



## CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER



# CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

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LONDON

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING  
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE  
NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, W.C. 2  
NEW YORK THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

*First published 1935*

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

IN LOVING MEMORY  
JAMES OTIS SARGENT HUNTINGTON  
O H C  
BEST OF FATHERS



## TO THE READER

THE author recognizes with some trepidation that in making any sort of study of the less discursive modes of prayer he is handling explosive material, and treading on ground that has been thoroughly mined. There has been amongst spiritual writers in all ages grave confusion of terms, and our own day is witnessing a lively and prolonged controversy over what constitutes contemplation. Père Poulain discovers no less than five different definitions of contemplation, scarcely one of which can be reconciled with any other<sup>1</sup>. It is, however, much more serious than a matter of terminology, for there is wide disagreement as to the interpretation of the masters who ought to be able to settle the issues for us. Father Baker disposes of this disagreement with his characteristic wisdom. He says, "Generally, mystic authors, when they treat of the several degrees of prayer, write according to their own experience in their own souls, as if the same instructions would serve indefinitely for all others. Whereas, such is the inexplicable variety of internal dispositions, that the same course and order in all things will scarce serve any two souls"<sup>2</sup>.

One cannot but feel convinced that much of the controversy would vanish if it were realized that most of the questions at issue belong to the realm of psychology

<sup>1</sup> Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, p. 60

<sup>2</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 88



rather than of theology, and that what in mystical writers are often taken to be clear distinctions or definitions, are, in many cases, only interior impressions which they have received, and which they are struggling in vain to put on record

The difficulty lies in the fact that they are seeking to define that which, from the nature of it, cannot be defined, and to express what human speech cannot compass. No man can look into another's soul and analyse what the Holy Spirit is doing there, nor can the human understanding grasp, or the tongue express, the experiences which the soul has within itself with the Spirit of God. The subject cannot be dealt with in a dogmatic fashion, for the "Spirit bloweth where He listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence He cometh or whither He goeth"

The scholasticism of the Middle Ages did a work of incalculable value in theology, but it left us more than one unfortunate heritage. One of these is its schematization of mysticism. Dom Butler complains that it set forth "a science of contemplation rather than contemplation itself, an intellectual system rather than a religious experience"; it forgot that "mysticism finds its working expression not in intellectual speculation, but in prayer"<sup>1</sup>

This book is a book of practice, and in it we shall not be interested in any mere philosophy of prayer. We want simply to know what prayer is, and how to engage in it. There is, therefore, no speculation in the following pages, nor will there be found in them any effort to solve any of the problems which have so long been subjects of controversy, nor yet to deal at all with the extraordinary or miraculous aspects of

<sup>1</sup> Butler, *Western Mysticism*, pp. 182 and 189.

mysticism The only object is, in a humble way, to introduce souls who desire to love God to that higher, simplified mode of prayer which St Francis de Sales calls contemplation, and which he describes as "no other than a loving, simple and permanent attention of the spirit to divine things" And we are assuming with St Augustine and St Gregory, with Father Augustine Baker and a host of other masters, ancient and modern, that such contemplation is open to all souls who are lovers of God and of their fellow-men, who are detached and mortified, who keep a guard over their hearts, and who are willing to endure the labour and suffering necessary in order to reach the heights

May the good God speed these halting pages to the help of some soul whom He would draw into closer and more loving union with Himself *Soli Deo gloria*

S C H

*Holy Cross Monastery,  
West Park, N T  
May, 1935*



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## CHAPTER I

### THE HIGHER WALK

SOME time since a humble but aspiring soul, after attending a retreat, wrote that it was a source of irresistible challenge and inspiration that the conductor had had the courage to assume that those he was seeking to guide were in reality moved by high spiritual ambitions, and dominated by a zealous and resolute determination to do all that in them lay to attain to these ambitions

All who have given any thought to the subject have had occasion from time to time to deplore the unhappy fact that so large a proportion of Christian people are content to walk merely within the pale of grace, without any active interest in doing those things which would create a wide margin of safety within which to carry on the operations of their spiritual life. They think to make themselves barely secure spiritually, and are content therewith. And more serious still, they seem not to have caught the least glimpse of the enduring joy that comes to those who are willing to seek persistently the high experiences of the divine companionship. When spoken to about this closer walk with God, they make it quite evident in many cases that they are being addressed in a language which is wholly strange to them. The best and richest things of Christian experience are sealed to them; indeed, they seem never to have known that such things existed

If this be the case—and we must acknowledge that it is—is it because those who are appointed to teach and to stimulate them, and to show them the heavenly vision, have not assumed as fully as they ought, that in many souls lofty spiritual ambitions lie dormant, and need only to be awakened and set in the way of activity? Experience has shown that in any group of souls living in grace there are always some, often many, who need only to have their attention called to the higher way, and they rise swiftly and seek to walk in it. Even a very small group of such persons in any parish would act like leaven, and would soon fill the whole with a powerful spiritual dynamic. “A few such secret and unknown servants of God,” says Father Baker, “are the chariots and horsemen, the strength and the bulwarks, of the kingdoms and Churches where they live”<sup>1</sup>

It is our purpose to discuss some methods, well proven in the spiritual history of the Church through the ages, for the training of souls for the higher walks of the kingdom; and which may be used in order to learn with greater assurance the geography of the roads along which we are to proceed. The one obvious, fundamental thing necessary to walking in the way that leads to God is prayer. But prayer is a generic, rather than a specific, term. When we come to study the science and art of prayer—the science which gives a knowledge of what prayer is, and the art which teaches us how to use it in a practical and effective manner—we find that there are various modes of prayer, and what is suited to one soul may not be suited to another. Much instruction is given on the duty of prayer in general, but how seldom is the

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Confessions*, p. 49

average congregation taught just what prayer is, and just how men are to pray. They find their prayers unsatisfying, they feel sure that something is lacking, they know not what it is, and too often they either give up, or grow listless in the practice of prayer, whereas a little direct and positive instruction regarding their particular difficulties would speedily effect the adjustment which is necessary, and enable them to go forward joyfully on the road that leads to the heavenly goal. One soul is temperamentally suited for one kind of prayer, while another would require a different method in order to achieve the best ends. It is also the case that God often calls one to a certain kind and degree of devotion, and that the soul knows not how to interpret the inner yearning and impulsion. If his prayer, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" is earnest and persistent, God will not let such a one fail, for He has always appointed in His Church guides and pastors whose duty and privilege it is to direct the course of His people.

It is in this regard that one of the chief functions of the spiritual physician and director has to be exercised. He must be a spiritual diagnostician who himself has had not only the training, but also, in some degree, the personal, interior experience which will enable him to recognize the need and prescribe accordingly. The spiritual physician is not one whose function it is only to restore the sick to health. There has been committed to him the general welfare of the souls within his cure, and he is bound not only to do that which will restore them should they contract spiritual ailments, but it is also his duty to provide for those who are already strong, that they may be able to grow and increase in strength. As



the pupils in a school make progress or lag behind according to the qualities possessed and exercised by the teachers, so the souls in the Church, which is the school of the Holy Spirit, will progress or fail to progress in proportion as those who are set to guide them have knowledge of the higher ways of prayer and zeal to direct others in it.

We must not get the impression, however, that this study is intended in any special way for the instruction of pastors and spiritual guides. This is by no means the aim, although if incidentally it effects such an end in certain cases, God be praised. But it is primarily and chiefly designed for the help of any soul, whatever its place in life, whose ambition it is to do something more than to keep barely within the limits of divine grace—who, seeking the upward path, desires, if it be God's will, to learn how best to run with swift steps the way of His commandments.

We shall see that God means this path for all who are simple of heart, who love Him and want to love Him more; and that no one should be deterred from entering it on account of whatever distractions may fill his daily life, or because he may not be possessed of learning, or other such intellectual equipment, for these latter are as likely to prove a snare as a help.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PRESENCE OF GOD

THE first step in seeking proficiency in prayer of any kind is to realize the presence of God with us and within us. It is impossible to speak intelligently or worthily to a person unless we have some realization that he is present. Let us understand in the beginning that this realization has nothing to do essentially with feeling and emotion. It is a realization of objective fact rather than an emotional experience. The latter may or may not exist. It makes little difference whether it does or not. It makes all the difference in the world whether I, by means of an unswerving faith, accept and appreciate the fact of the divine presence which God has revealed.

“The Practice of the Presence of God”—how often in our spiritual books do we find this expression. How many times do we hear it in sermons and retreats, and yet few expressions are more baffling. The difficulty usually is that we think of the presence of God as of an intellectual concept instead of thinking of God. We set our minds upon a *presence* rather than upon *God*. We find in certain books of devotion misleading directions about this presence. We are told to say to ourselves, “God is here with me; He sees me, He knows me, He loves me.” This may be well enough in its way as a theme for meditation on the precious fact of the divine presence. As such it might

be a ready help, but it would surely be thought to be an absurdity if I should advise you to deepen your love for an earthly friend by repeatedly saying to yourself whenever you were with him, "My friend is here; he knows me, he loves me" To do this would be a definite withdrawal of your attention from your friend and a centring of it upon your own mental conception of his presence This would be a form of self-centredness You would abandon him for the consideration of your own thought concerning him You do not want to be conscious of his presence; you want to be conscious of him The method so often suggested is too likely to make us self-conscious of God, if we might be allowed the expression, instead of being conscious of Him Utter self-forgetfulness is necessary in order to centre our attention wholly upon another; and self-forgetfulness is not to be achieved by thinking steadily upon my own thoughts, however good and holy these thoughts may be One of the old desert Fathers went so far as to say that he who was directly conscious of praying was not praying<sup>1</sup> It is not the consideration of the divine presence that counts, but the personal experience with Him who is present The former is an intellectual study, the latter a participation by faith, hope and love in the personal companionship of God, without processes of reasoning The former may increase our knowledge, but mere knowledge does not produce change and development of character in the Godward direction, which is what we are seeking This comes only through the exercise of faith, hope and love

We must find our example in the manner in which God's servants of old practised the divine presence

<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Coll* IX. 30

In making real to herself the comforting fact of His strong and protecting presence, Hagar did not practise self-recollection, but God-recollection. She did not tell herself that He was present with her; she brought herself into direct communication with Him. She spoke to Him—"Thou, God, seest me." Likewise the Psalmist, when in a "barren and dry land," where there was no comforting sense or consciousness of the divine presence, did not reason with himself about the fact, but turned directly to God with a personal cry straight from his heart "O God, Thou art my God."

In order to secure a realization of the divine presence, I must practise those things which will make me personally conscious of Him. The emphasis here must be on the word *practise*. There are certain things I must do which, after a little while, will produce the habit desired. In like manner if I am to acquire a deep, permanent consciousness of God, I must with closest attention go through such exercises as will impress my being profoundly with God Himself as the one great, fundamental, all-transcending Fact of the moral, spiritual and physical universe, and that, at the same time, He is with and within me.

Now what is this practice of the Presence of God? How do I go about it? I practise the presence of God just as I practise the presence of a fellow-creature, that is, by direct intercourse with him. If I am actually speaking to a man I am, while in the act of addressing him, clearly conscious of his presence, and the influence of that presence, whatever it may be, is upon me in full force. If my mind is normal it is an impossibility for me, while speaking to him, to forget his presence. It matters little what I say, but the more frequently I speak with him, and the more

prolonged my conversation, the more deeply and permanently do I become conscious of him, and my understanding of the meaning and value of his presence is shown by the nature of my communication with him. If I am living in the same house with him, so that we are in continual communication, I acquire a permanent and dominant sense of the fact that he is there. If he goes away for a few days I am definitely affected by his absence. It makes automatically a difference in my way of thinking and acting, and this quite independently of specific acts of my will. How often does it happen that on returning from the funeral of one we love who has been taken from us after having lived for many years very close to us, we find ourselves saying, "The house, the room, seem so terribly empty." We had been conscious continually (or perhaps subconsciously, which is an even more powerful form of consciousness) of that dear presence. Our way of thinking, our whole life, had been dominated by it, and when it was removed the void was very dreadful. Continual communication had made us continually conscious of him.

This principle holds good in all life. God made us with a nature which operates in this manner in respect to all those with whom we associate, and, therefore, if we give play to this principle, it will work in the same way with respect to Him. Hence, the practice of the presence of God is like the practice of the presence of any other one dear to us. By loving intercourse with Him, by speaking to Him and with Him, we gain an abiding sense of His presence, just as we gained the sense of the presence of that loved one whose absence makes life empty and hollow.

Thus do we see that there is nothing difficult or

baffling about the practice of the divine presence We have only to turn to God with the same effort—if effort it be, and there is no effort where love is—which we are constantly employing in the ordinary relationships of human life

There is one grave difference which must be taken into account, however The fact of the presence of a companion in this world can be verified at any time by the senses Such is not the case with the presence of God; but this does not mean that the fact of His presence is less certain than that of the friend whom we see daily In the one case it is a matter of sight, in the other it is a matter of faith But faith is not a vague, uncertain thing He who regards it as such has failed wholly to grasp the meaning of the word “Faith is the evidence of things unseen,” and a much more sure evidence than that of the senses, which so often deceive us After all, most of the things in human life which we accept depend upon what is called moral certainty, that is, a certainty which cannot be mathematically or philosophically demonstrated, and which therefore cannot be placed in the sphere of scientific knowledge, but which is a thing so fixed and determined in my mind, so free from all question, that I act upon it without hesitation, and precisely as though I had mathematical demonstration of its truth In short, I act on faith Practically everything in life falls into this category I can be only morally certain that the sun rose this morning. I may have stood at my window and seen it come up over the hills at its appointed hour, but I may also have been labouring under a mental hallucination But I act as though there was no question I am morally certain of the fact “As there is a condition

of the mind that is characterized by invincible ignorance, so there is another which may be said to be possessed of invincible knowledge"<sup>1</sup> Such is the condition of the soul who, having to the best of its knowledge and ability, followed the will of God, believes that He is present to it, and in all things behaves accordingly It is governed by "invincible knowledge" in every interior and exterior action It does not ask for, nor is it interested in, argument, reason or proof It is possessed of a certitude which is all-satisfying, and which supplies it with a sure warrant to go forward to action without doubt or hesitation. It was this invincible knowledge which enabled St Paul to set certainty alongside of faith, if one might so speak, and to say, "I know whom I have believed"<sup>2</sup> The expression in strict rhetoric is a contradiction in terms, but it presents one of those inspired paradoxes which lift us up above the secular and material, and place us in the realm of the spiritual and divine

But our problems concerning the presence of God are not yet disposed of Where is this presence? Where are we to find Him that His presence may be to us a practical and efficacious thing, something more than a mere intellectual conception, however clear? God is, indeed, everywhere, but there is little comfort to the yearning soul if it thinks of Him only as present everywhere by a certain immanence or transcendence Let us then understand that the presence we seek is within our own souls No other mode of

<sup>1</sup> Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p 201

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim 1 12 If anyone wishes to secure a light on this subject, let him make a careful study of the use of the word "know" in the New Testament, especially in St Paul's Epistles, and in the first Epistle of St John

presence counts for anything, so far as our moral and spiritual life is concerned, unless He dwells also in our hearts.

Even the Real Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is nothing to us, nay, the knowledge of it might even be a hurt and a torment to us, unless He is able through that Sacrament to enter into us and dwell in us. This was the exact and repeated teaching of our Lord. "I am in My Father, and ye in Me and I in you . . . If a man love Me, he will keep My words and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. Abide in Me and I in you. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (St John xv). The same teaching is repeated in His High-Priestly prayer. "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one . . . that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (St John xvii). St Paul emphasizes this truth in numerous passages, and it has been insisted upon through the ages by the Fathers and teachers of the Church everywhere.

In her treatment of the Lord's Prayer, St Teresa devotes two chapters to the consideration of the words, "Who art in heaven," and tells us that in order that we may understand what we are saying and whom we are addressing, we must withdraw our senses from outward things, and keep them occupied within our souls. Then we shall possess heaven within us, since the King of heaven dwells there. "There He sits upon a throne of priceless value, and this throne is your heart." Her idea of the prayer of recollection is based upon this truth. This kind of prayer she calls recollection, because by its means the soul collects



together all the faculties and enters *within herself* to be with God <sup>1</sup>

Father Baker, speaking of recollection, says, "The proper seat, the throne and kingdom where God by His Holy Spirit dwells and reigns, is the purest summit of man's spirit. There it is that the soul most perfectly enjoys and contemplates God; though He is, as in regard to Himself, everywhere equally present, yet in regard of the communication of His perfections, He is present in man's soul after a far more noble manner than in any part of the world besides . . . Hence it is that our Saviour says, 'The kingdom of God is within you', and therefore it is that religious, solitary and abstracted souls do endeavour to turn all their thoughts inward, raising them to the pure top of the spirit where God is most perfectly seen and most comfortably enjoyed" <sup>2</sup>

Archbishop Ullathorne gathers this teaching together in a trenchant passage "God is everywhere, but not everywhere *to us*. There is but one point in the universe where God communicates with us, and that is the centre of our own soul. There He waits for us, there He meets us, there He speaks to us. To seek Him, therefore, we must enter into our own interior" <sup>3</sup>

It is evident, therefore, that in practising the presence of God we are to look within, not without. We are not to allow the imagination to project our attention to some external place or condition where God may exist, for however He may exist there, it is not there that we can communicate with Him, but only in our souls. This was the mistake which St. Augustine tells

<sup>1</sup> St. Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, chs. xxviii and xxix

<sup>2</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, pp. 151, 152

<sup>3</sup> Ullathorne, *Groundwork of the Christian Virtues*, Lect. III, p. 74.

us he made when he was searching after God, and found Him only after having lost much precious time because he did not seek Him aright "Too late have I loved Thee, O Beauty, so ancient and yet so new," he cries, "too late have I loved Thee! For, behold, Thou wert within, and I without, and it was without that I did seek Thee!"<sup>1</sup>

While the expression should be used with caution since it might easily be misunderstood, yet none the less are those authors right who tell us that there is just as real and objective a presence of God, the Holy Trinity, in the soul as there is of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament "His presence within us is the presence of the Most Holy Trinity, revealed to us by faith The Father comes to us and continues to beget His Word within us With the Father we receive the *Son*, equal in all things to the Father, His loving and substantial image, who never ceases to love His Father with the same infinite love wherewith the Father loves Him Out of this mutual love proceeds the *Holy Spirit*, a Person equal to the Father and the Son, and a mutual bond between Father and Son The Three are withal distinct one from the other These wonders go on continually within the soul in the state of grace. The presence of the three Divine Persons, at once physical and moral, establishes the *most intimate* and *most sanctifying* relations between God and the soul Gathering all that is found here and there in the Scriptures, we can say that God through grace is present within us as a *Father*, as a *Friend*, as a *Helper*, as a *Sanctifier*, and that in this way He is truly the very source of our interior life, its *efficient* and *exemplary* cause"

<sup>1</sup> St Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk X, ch xxvii

The same writer we are quoting sums the matter up as follows —“ Above all, we recall the fact that the three Divine Persons dwell within us and that our heart is a living tabernacle, a heaven, wherein They give Themselves to us even now It is enough, then, simply to recollect ourselves, to enter within the inner sanctuary of our soul, as St Catherine of Siena calls it, and contemplate with the eyes of faith the Divine Guest who deigns to abide there Then shall we live under His gaze, under His influence, then shall we adore Him and co-operate with Him in the sanctification of our souls ”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A Tanquery, *The Spiritual Life*, Nos 92 and 446

## CHAPTER III

### PRAYER WITHOUT CEASING

A SPECIALLY sheltered life is not a necessary requirement for the cultivation of the higher walks of prayer. Those who live busy lives in the world may become quite proficient in the work of prayer if they know how to use their opportunities. Our Lord's teaching that "men ought always to pray and not to faint," and St. Paul's brief and unqualified command, "Pray without ceasing," when understood, throw light upon some of the difficulties of this way of devotion.

To the ignorant these commands seem impossible ones. Life is filled with manifold duties. Even in the strictest cloister this same condition exists which uninstructed souls often take to be an insuperable barrier. These duties engage our time and hold our attention. In most instances they engage us during certain periods of each day in such a manner that it is out of the question to give conscious attention to anything else, for no man is able to think with concentration of more than one thing at a time. If I am attending faithfully to a piece of work which constitutes my duty at the moment, I cannot at the same time give my conscious, deliberate attention to God.

There must be some solution of this perplexity, for not only does God never command impossibilities, but His commands are never even grievous. The solution is simple when once we find it, and the spiritual masters

to whom we are accustomed to look for guidance do not leave us without direction. They tell us that the continuity of prayer which the apostle commands is moral, not rigorous and literal. The great French bishop, Bossuet, who has taught us so much about the life and technique of prayer, says, "Continuous prayer does not consist in a perpetual tension of mind."<sup>1</sup> It demands not continual acts of prayer, but the continual habit of prayer.

To understand this we must examine the meaning of the word *habit*. It is a word which we use constantly in our daily conversation, and yet there are many intelligent minds which have only a vague idea of its significance. We have only to go to a dictionary to find its meaning. Webster defines it as "a settled disposition or tendency leading one to do easily, naturally, and with growing skill or certainty what one does often," until, after a time, the action becomes practically independent of specific acts of the will.

But the definition requires further explication. We say that a settled disposition is required, and it is also necessary to ask what is meant by disposition. It is "a state of being ordered or arranged with reference to some special design." In other words, when we say we possess a certain habit, we mean that our mental, moral and spiritual faculties are so disposed, are arranged in such an order, are equipped with such a power, and so trained and educated, that under certain given conditions they readily and with regularity and constancy converge upon a corresponding action. If we know what a person's disposition is, as a rule we are able to predict how he will act under certain circumstances. "I was sure he would do thus and thus,"

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, *Meditations on the Gospel*, VI, pp. 61 and 62

we often say, because we know the person's mental and moral habits and disposition.

But when we speak of doing a certain thing habitually we do not mean that the acts which correspond to the habit must be literally continuous. In respect to prayer the apostle could not have meant this because he himself gave these same Thessalonians to whom he was writing many other commands, the fulfilment of which would have been impossible had they been required to set their attention directly, constantly and consciously upon definite and intelligent acts of prayer.

When we speak of habit it does mean, however, that the interior disposition must so continually govern us that when certain conditions become present, the act which corresponds to the habit will be presently produced. We might here illustrate a good thing by a parable of a bad one, as our Lord did in the story of the unjust judge. We may say truthfully of a certain man that he is an habitual liar. We do not mean that he never under any circumstances speaks what is true. Indeed, we can be sure that he speaks a great deal that is true. If he remarks that the day is fine, we do not hold our judgment in suspense until we can look out of the window to make sure that it is not storming. What we mean is that under certain conditions, where there enter, for example, pride and vanity, self-interest or perhaps fear, the lie promptly emerges. He sets up almost by instinct the protective mechanism of a lie. His interior dispositions are such that their reaction to certain impinging circumstances brings it forth promptly.

Habits of this kind, whether they be good habits or bad, produce their acts without the mind stopping to

reason or consider On this principle, therefore, the work of prayer without cessation consists of the maintenance of an interior quality, and this quality or disposition of mind continues in undiminished force even though many minutes or hours may pass without consciously directed acts of prayer

Bossuet tells us that this continuous prayer which the apostle commands consists of "a profound application of the will, fixed upon God alone by the force of the habit of holy love By the stability of this habit we tend to a continuous state of prayer if we never deliberately omit any of those things which are necessary for attaining and maintaining it This habit produces a succession of good actions, so immediate and uniform that we see their dependence upon one great interior principle as their source, that is to say, on a habit of holy love, which in this life is called contemplation, or continual prayer "

Bossuet uses an expression here which it would be profitable for us to consider He speaks of a state of prayer This *state* must be distinguished from the *act* of prayer, and the state must not be thought to cease when the act ceases One does not have to be thinking directly and consciously of God at every moment in order to be praying, or to be making an unbroken series of acts of love—that is, to be unceasingly and deliberately thinking or doing loving things, in order to be in a state of love We say that a certain man is wholly devoted to his wife and children He thinks of them frequently with a strong surging up of actual love for them But there are many hours of the day when it is impossible for him to be thinking of them, for the reason that his mind is filled with other necessary things, things necessary for him to centre his mind upon

if he is to do his work of love for them. Likewise, in the unconsciousness of sleep he is not thinking of them with definite sentiments of love, and yet it would be absurd to say that a man stopped loving his wife when he fell asleep. The consciousness of love is submerged, but the love itself flows on in the subconsciousness in unbroken current with undiminished power. The very actions which draw his attention away from his loved ones are acts of devotion to them.

So is it in our relation to God. If a man can love in such manner those to whom he is bound by earthly ties, so also can he love God, and so will it be in our life of prayer. The state of love and the consequent state of prayer are proved to exist if the heart swiftly, easily and sweetly is able to rise up in acts of love, praise and adoration as soon as consciousness is restored, as soon as the attention of the mind and will is brought to bear upon God. To live in this state is to pray without ceasing.

The duties which prevent us from thinking directly of God, if offered to Him as our service of love, are in themselves acts of prayer, for prayer consists not only of thoughts and words, but also of actions. Indeed, because actions cost us more than thoughts and words, they are generally of greater value as prayer. As St. Clement says of the consecrated soul, "He prays everywhere—walking, conversing, composing, reading—all reasonable works are different works of prayer"<sup>1</sup>. St. Teresa bears witness out of her profound experiences that "it occasionally or even frequently happens that the will alone is united to God, and in a state of deep peace tastes the joy of its union with Him while the imagination and memory preserve

<sup>1</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VII 7



sufficient liberty to occupy themselves with their own affairs, engaging in works of charity " <sup>1</sup>

Nor need the offering of the duty which distracts the attention from God be more than a virtual offering. If we have a general desire, maintained sincerely, to devote all our actions to Him in loving service, it will not be necessary to make a definite and conscious offering of each detail of the action. A general offering to Him of the day's work at the beginning of the day, recalled devoutly from time to time and repeated at the close, will suffice.

We are not to be deceived, however, into thinking that we are to depend wholly upon the unconscious operation of habit. Habits are acquired and strengthened by the repetition of the acts which are the expression of them. But habits can also be lost by the neglect of these acts. If when habit urges us we do not yield to it, each such failure to yield weakens the habit and it is soon lost. From time to time there must be conscious and deliberate acts of the will, otherwise we are likely to find the habit slipping away from us. We have all had the experience of being startled by the sudden realization that some habit we used to practise continually no longer has any place in our life. We had no intention of giving it up. It simply slipped off from us, like an unguarded cloak from the shoulders, because we failed to give due attention to the acts. I do not have to pray every minute of the day in order to fulfil the command to "pray without ceasing," but I shall soon cease to pray if I do not see to it that the practice of prayer is persisted in.

One test of habit we should keep in mind. If the habit is dominant, the moment the attention is with-

<sup>1</sup> St. Teresa, *Life*, XVII 5

drawn from other things the mind, automatically, we might say, reverts to acts of love and to prayer. No deliberate or forced attention is required. No outward circumstance is needed to produce the acts, or even to remind us of them. The interior habit is sufficient for the production of the act, for the current of prayer is flowing full and strong, and even though it be submerged for the time being, the undercurrents are, after all, those which control and affect life most powerfully.

## CHAPTER IV

### OF THE FOUR MODES OF PRAYER

IN a notable book by the learned and devout French Franciscan, Father Ludovic de Besse,<sup>1</sup> the author begins his introductory chapter with the simple but arresting words, "To have a low idea of prayer is to pray badly." The philosophy of this saying must be clear to all. To have a low idea of anything is to use it badly. But a high idea of prayer, either for ourselves or others, can come only from an appreciation of who God, to whom we pray, is; and of an understanding of our deep need of Him, combined with a devout study and observation of the practical ways in which through the ages the Holy Spirit seems to have led souls into the paths of righteousness. Of course, it is not everyone who is capable of making an historical study of the methods used by the Spirit, but he who perseveres faithfully in the ordinary walks of prayer will not be lacking in an appreciation of the fundamental relationships which exist between God and the praying soul, and a knowledge of these relationships, as we have just suggested, will produce the right idea of prayer so as to enable us to pray well.

We are familiar with the divisions called Ordinary and Extraordinary prayer. Ordinary prayer is that which, by the assistance of divine grace, we can learn through our own efforts. This kind of prayer, in one

<sup>1</sup> Ludovic de Besse, *The Science of Prayer*

form or another, is both possible and necessary to all souls. With extraordinary prayer, that is, such experiences as visions, voices, ecstasies, raptures, and other such, of which we find accounts in the lives of the saints, we are not concerned here. These states of prayer are not to be sought after, nor are they at all necessary for salvation, or for the development of saintliness.

The four modes of ordinary prayer are vocal, mental, affective, and contemplative prayer. It is not our purpose to consider the first three of these forms save only in so far as they bear upon the subject of contemplation. But because they are most closely related to contemplation, because they are normally the steps by which the soul ascends the mount of contemplation, they must, in such a study as we are undertaking, be dealt with.

But it will also be seen that these cannot in every case be regarded as wholly distinct and separate stages. The sequence in which they are usually set down is not always maintained, and in considering them we shall not be at pains to maintain it. In practice they will be seen to overlap, as well as to merge with each other in unexpected ways, and numerous instances of progress in prayer may be found where one or another of these steps will be missing.

But even where the stages may seem quite clearly marked, none the less do the various forms of ordinary prayer pass normally without sudden break of transition from the lower stage to the higher. The law of continuity which governs all normal life, governs prayer. The form may be different, but the life is the same. Just as the dry, hard seed, planted in the moist earth, passes normally, and without violent break,

into the green shoot, and the shoot goes on to develop flower and fruit, so the soul goes on from the lower to the higher forms of prayer. The Abbé Saudreau argues at length against the not uncommon idea that in order "to pass from the meditative to the contemplative state, a sudden upswinging flight of the soul is required, an overwhelming gust of grace, an almost miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit" So far from allowing this, he says that the course of such prayer "rises by a continuous ascent until it attains to this high level of the spiritual life"<sup>1</sup> All that is required for this steady upward progress is faithfulness and devotion in the particular phase of prayer upon which we are engaged at the time If the will takes care of this, the Holy Spirit does all else within us

The law of continuity will operate to carry the soul on, if it be God's will, even to the prayer of ultimate mystical union Although all spiritual guides are at one in the judgment that we should not definitely set out to gain such favours, yet it cannot be doubted that there are many souls, as there have been in every age, who have received the sublimest favours from God, but of whom the world has known nothing For the edification of the Church, God willed that certain saints like St Paul, St Francis of Assisi, St Teresa, and many others should live their lives under such circumstances as would give world-wide and age-wide publicity to their spiritual experiences But this does not mean that there may not have been many others equally favoured, saints as holy or even holier, unknown on earth, but well known in heaven It never occurred to them to analyse their experiences, even if they had been intellectually capable of doing so One classic

<sup>1</sup> Saudreau, *Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, II 4

instance of this is narrated by St Teresa, who recounts the case of one of her nuns who, after years of effort, acknowledged with grief and tears that she had never been able to attain to the contemplative prayer which the saint taught her sisters. On inquiry, however, it was found that by the mere repeating of the petitions of the Our Father over and over again, and dwelling upon the mystery of our Lord's sufferings, "she had risen to a state of pure contemplation where our Lord held her closely united to Himself"<sup>1</sup> Illustrations of this might be multiplied, like that of the ignorant countrywoman of whom Father Hollings tells us, who was vouchsafed some mystical vision of our Lord whenever she made her communion, and who, in the holy simplicity of her heart, supposed, until God for His own good reasons withdrew the vision, that everyone saw Him in the same manner when they received the Holy Sacrament.

All this goes to prove that while the observation of His method with the souls of men seems to show that ordinarily He follows certain lines and principles, which must be so since He works in harmony with the human psychology which He Himself created, yet the Spirit of God does not deal with all souls in the same manner. He bloweth where He listeth, and it is not for us too finely or curiously to seek to divine whence He cometh or whither He goeth.

<sup>1</sup> St Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, ch. xxx. 7

## CHAPTER V

### VOCAL PRAYER . ITS NATURE AND END

IN addressing those who profess to be Christians, there is little need to stress the importance of vocal prayer, that is, the prayer which consists of certain forms of words, expressive of praise, adoration, penitence, thanksgiving, petition, or other uttered aspirations of the heart of man towards God. When the ordinary Christian speaks of prayer, he usually means vocal prayer as exercised in what we commonly call "saying our prayers." We rarely have to strive to gain the consent of Christian folk to the obligation of this kind of prayer, however much they may need to be stimulated in their personal use of it, or to be instructed as to its content and technique.

Mental prayer, or what we call meditation, is less commonly recognized as a Christian obligation, and many souls do not realize until their attention is called to it that vocal prayer, if it is not to be a mockery, must, in every instance, be accompanied by mental prayer. Forms of prayer, such as the Our Father, repeated slowly, thoughtfully and lovingly, again and again, become mental prayer; but, in any event, he who does not bring the powers of loving thought to bear upon the forms of prayer he is using may be "saying his prayers," but he is certainly not praying.

Vocal prayer commonly accompanies all the other forms of ordinary prayer. Father Baker goes so far as

to reject too definite a differentiation of vocal from other kinds of prayer. "It is not to be esteemed a peculiar degree of prayer," he says, "but it may and doth accompany all these states without any change in the substance of the prayer

Whilst the soul is in the imperfect degree of meditation, she performs her vocal prayers with the use of grosser images and much distractedness, but being arrived to the exercises of the will [that is, affective prayer] she recites them with less multiplicity and some good measure of recollection, and being in the exercise of aspirations [that is, contemplation], her vocal prayers become likewise aspirative and unitive, not at all distracting her, but rather driving her more profoundly and intimately into God"<sup>1</sup> In another place the same author says, "The ordinary division of prayer into vocal and mental is improper because the parts of the division are coincident; for vocal prayer as distinguished from (and much more as opposed to) mental, is indeed no prayer at all"<sup>2</sup>

Father Baker regards vocal prayer as an "instrument or mean to bring a soul to contemplation," and testifies that anciently many souls did attain to contemplation by passing directly from vocal prayer without going through the intermediate stages of meditation or affective prayer, thus transcending certain of the steps which are ordinarily traversed. He does not advise, however, that this course be attempted, for he thinks it demands "such wonderful solitude or abstraction, rigorous abstinences, and incredible assiduity in praying" as conditions of life in later centuries render impossible. He would allow it, however, in the case of "simple and unlearned"

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 402

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 343



persons, whose intellectual limitations preclude them from practising meditation. He declares that in this latter time God's hand is not shortened, and he goes on to describe three degrees of vocal prayer, the highest of which brings the soul thus directly to what so discriminating a master does not hesitate to call "perfect contemplation"<sup>1</sup>

The first of these degrees of vocal prayer is a simple but close attention to the meaning of the prayer, psalm, or other form of words that is being repeated. But since the constant change in the form demands an equally constant shifting of the attention from one thought to another, it is not possible with the use of this method of vocal prayer to fix the attention and affections directly upon God Himself, for the mind is engaged in following the ever-changing thought, although that thought be concerning God.

The second degree is that in which, while the changing words are being repeated, the heart refuses to be bound to the shifting meaning, but sets its affections firmly on God Himself. It is this degree of vocal prayer that the Abbé Saudreau and Père Poulain apparently have in mind when they naïvely suggest that saying the Divine Office in an unknown tongue gives opportunity for a loving attention to God, since the mind cannot be distracted from direct concentration on Him by the flow of active thought regarding the meaning of what is said. Even those who insist that prayer should be made in a language understood of the people must acknowledge that there is something in this contention. We who conduct our Offices in the vernacular do not hesitate to say in the public services of the Church, or in our private devotions, such

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, pp. 344-48

words as "Hosanna" and "Alleluia," and yet how many worshippers in the average congregation know what these two words mean? But one thing we know, and that is enough—they are expressions of praise and honour to God, and, as such, they edify us and stimulate our work of prayer. Ignorant Protestants, we are told, sometimes find a devotional impulse in the solemn pronouncement of the word "Selah," and if its use draws them nearer to God, who would say them nay?

"A third and most sublime degree of attention to the Divine Office," says Father Baker, "is that whereby vocal prayers do become mental, that is, whereby souls most profoundly and with a perfect simplicity united to God, can yet, without any prejudice to such union, attend also to the sense and spirit of each passage that they pronounce, yea, thereby find their affection, adhesion and union increased and more simplified. This attention comes not till a soul be arrived at perfect contemplation, by means of which the spirit is so habitually united to God, and besides, the imagination so subdued to the spirit, that it cannot rest upon anything that will distract it" <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 348

## CHAPTER VI

### AFFECTIVE PRAYER

IN the beginnings of the spiritual life it is necessary that before anything else we acquire a deep, personal conviction of the truth of the revelation of God, of His nature and being, of His sovereignty, His justice, His love and tenderness, and all His other revealed attributes, and also of what our relation to Him is. In the early stages, reasoned processes are required in order to gain such conviction. Therefore, the best form of interior prayer for beginners is discursive meditation. The word *discursive*, as we use it here, must not be taken to mean rambling, or digressive, but that which proceeds by discourse, reason and argument, rather than by intuition.

Until the soul becomes skilled in such exercises it is best to use some one of the many methods which have been tried and been proved effective, and the use of a book often secures us against needless distraction, and prevents mere reverie which is not meditation. It is to be remembered that most of the authorities regard thoughtful reading as an approved method of meditation.

But this prayer of meditation has as its chief object the enlightening of the mind for our own spiritual benefit. If God is to receive the full honour due Him we cannot stop with this. A powerful conviction of what and who God is having been acquired, we are then to proceed

systematically to a mode of prayer which looks to His honour and glory rather than to the benefits we might receive from Him. We must enter upon the prayer of love, honouring and adoring the divine Giver rather than enjoying the divine gifts.

Of course this element must in definite degree be found in all our devotions. Were it at any time wholly absent, our exercises could not be called prayer at all, but it is not regarded as advisable to leave off meditation, and practise the prayer of the affections in any intensive or long-continued way, until these convictions have become so ingrained in the soul that they constitute an integral part of our habitual state of mind, and little or no effort is required to recall them and to bring them into action. They become to us as first principles of life.

A simple illustration will show what we mean. We meditate upon our heavenly Father, upon His love and goodness, His power and wisdom, which are so unceasingly exercised towards us and in our behalf. We make these meditations by marshalling the facts which He has made known to us, and by entering upon a course of reasoning and reflection concerning Him and our relation to Him, followed by a resolution looking to the betterment of our life. Out of these reasonings arise certain conclusions respecting Him, and these conclusions impress our consciousness as so entirely true that they pass out of the category of being merely logically inevitable into moral convictions so profound as to be unshakable. After a time these convictions become thoroughly grounded in our souls, and the loving Fatherhood of God appears to us so natural a relationship that we are no longer disposed to discourse about it, or to analyse it. We become as the

little child to whom the father who has ever loved it and cared for it is not an object of reason and analysis, but of spontaneous, unreflecting love and delight. When this condition exists, our reasonings pass readily into devout affections which arise easily and sweetly, and prayer becomes what is called affective prayer

Alvarez de Paz, who was the first to give this prayer its name, as quoted by the Abbé Pourrat, says, "Since mental prayer consists in raising the mind and will to God, it follows, according to spiritual writers, that there are two kinds of prayer—intellective, which takes its name from the intelligence, and affective, which is so named because it is made by the affections of the will" <sup>1</sup>

As intellective or mental prayer is not without its element of love, so affective prayer does not wholly exclude reasoning and reflection. Both kinds of prayer take their names from the element which is predominant in them. The ultimate aim of all prayer is to stimulate love for God. Meditation does this by the intellectual consideration of certain ideas. Affective prayer seeks to do this by direct and intensive impulses of the affections. In affective prayer ideas are few, and desires and aspirations motivated by love predominate. St Teresa expresses it simply but beautifully when she says that such prayer is "nothing but an intimate friendship, a frequent converse, heart to heart, with one whom we know to be our Lover" <sup>2</sup>

Affective prayer, like contemplation, as we shall see, is based upon knowledge which comes through the use of the reason; and when one reaches this point in the progress of prayer, intellectual processes are minimized,

<sup>1</sup> Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, III 221

<sup>2</sup> St Teresa, *Life*, ch viii 7

although they are not—indeed, cannot ever be—wholly absent<sup>1</sup> St Vincent de Paul was devoted to affective prayer, and unceasingly urged his disciples “not to loiter with reasoning during prayer, but to be diligent in making acts of the affections”<sup>2</sup>

Unlike contemplative prayer, affective prayer may be marked by an emotional quality, by devotional impetuosity which Father Baker warns us can have no place in contemplation. Such a quality is not a waiting upon God with that simplicity which will enable Him to do for us what He wills. Rather does it imply a lack of passivity, a more or less intense activity of our faculties, even of the senses. As we shall see, an important part in that simplification of prayer which issues in contemplation is the elimination of this emotional quality.

Affective prayer is a prayer of the will and of the affections, and exercises of the will are the most sublime that the soul can practise. They involve the stirring of the will to the end that love may be enkindled. Affective prayer involves a degree of emotional love and the expression of it which is absent from contemplation. It is difficult to say just where meditation ends and affective prayer begins. Indeed, we follow the consensus of the authorities when we do not attempt to draw any hard-and-fast line between them, for, as we are to see, earnest, loving meditation melts imperceptibly into affective prayer. “He who has made considerable progress in meditation,” says one writer, “passes insensibly into affective prayer, which, being between meditation and contemplation, as the dawn

<sup>1</sup> See Pourrat, *op cit*, III 226, for a discussion of Suarez’s argument on this point.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, III 393

is between the night and the day, possesses something of both one and of the other " <sup>1</sup> This thought might be followed up with the suggestion that affective prayer is the evening twilight of meditation and the morning twilight of contemplation

Father Nouet's definition suggests the question, often discussed, whether affective prayer is a strictly differentiated form of prayer, and the best authorities are not disposed to regard it as such. As defined by Father Augustine Baker, it "is the only efficacious instrument that immediately brings souls to contemplation, and perfect union in spirit with God" <sup>2</sup> It should not, therefore, be thought of as a permanent form of devotion. It is a prayer of transition, and the faithful soul cannot remain long in it, but will pass on, at least occasionally, to contemplation. To remain for an indefinite period in the constant exercise of effective prayer, with no contemplative exercise whatever, would mean a state of arrested spiritual development, but the operation of the human spirit being what it is, such cases are not likely to occur. If the affective prayer is genuine, some degree of contemplation is inevitable.

Affective prayer consists of tender, familiar colloquies with the Beloved, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; or, of other acts which involve the exercise of the Christian virtues which one must ever seek to cultivate. It is a fact that is often overlooked, that the difficulty we find in practising the Christian virtues arises in a large proportion of cases less from a want of knowledge than from a lack of both good-will towards God and of a practical working grasp upon the virtues of faith, hope and love.

<sup>1</sup> Nouet, quoted by Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Baker, *Sacra Suf'ia*, p. 330

Unless the will and the affections can be aroused, the mere knowledge of truth brings us nowhere. The virtues we need to acquire are gained not by reflecting on them, but by practising them. Hence the kind of prayer that puts into action the Christian virtues is of more value and merit than that which consists in study about God and His revelation of Himself. Effect upon character and conduct is what is desired primarily, not merely a clear intellectual understanding. Indeed, such an understanding of the truth might easily be to our hurt and condemnation. As St. Peter teaches us, "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them"<sup>1</sup>. Men frequently find themselves knowing and profoundly admiring certain truths, but these truths have no effect upon their course of life. The result is that they become hardened to truth with grave hurt to their spiritual life.

Affective prayer is a work of the will in which we actually think and do those things which are the exercise, and therefore the strengthening, of faith, hope, love, and all the other virtues which must be present in dominating force in the Christian's life. Intellectual meditation alone will not accomplish this. The Abbé Saudreau puts it well when he says, "Prayer should be chiefly an exercise of love, and the perfect love is that which is breathed directly into the soul by God"—not that which is acquired by our own reason, if indeed love can ever be so acquired. The Abbé goes on to say, "Reasoning is not love; the work of the imagination is not love, the composition of place is not love, spiritual reading may help to fix the attention

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 11: 21



and prevent distractions, but to make any of these the foundation of prayer would be to hinder the working of grace and the growth of love" <sup>1</sup> We recall St. Teresa's saying, that "the proficiency of the soul consists not in thinking much, but in loving much" <sup>2</sup> Father Baker gives us a worthy conclusion of the matter when he writes "Affective prayer of the will is that alone which makes all other sorts of prayer to deserve the name of prayer, for were that excluded, meditation is but a useless speculation and curiosity of the understanding, and vocal prayer but an empty sound of words" <sup>3</sup>

We are not, however, to regard meditation, or any other form of discursive prayer, as negligible. There are souls who from ignorance, or lack of training in mental exercises, are unable to meditate in a logical way, and again, there are happy souls whose simple, unaffected faith never seems to require theological reasoning in order to awaken their love. But nevertheless, as a rule, knowledge being necessary to love, most souls, however simple or unlearned, require a certain direct consideration of a subject before it will awaken in them the movement of love.

Love is impossible without a knowledge of the beloved one, and while there are cases where knowledge comes by way of swift and sure intuition, generally speaking it arises out of the intellectual consideration of the object to be loved, and it would be rash to assume that we can love God without first seeking to know Him in His revealed nature and perfections. In the classical statement of the purpose of man's existence—

<sup>1</sup> Saudreau, *The Ideal of the Fervent Soul*, p. 147

<sup>2</sup> St. Teresa, *Foundations*, ch. v. 2

<sup>3</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 355

to know God, to love God, and to serve God—knowledge precedes love.

On the other hand, it is quite possible, and it is a common peril, especially to those who enjoy intellectual exercises, for us to linger altogether too long in meditation. The object of meditation is not to acquire a further knowledge of God for the mere pleasure of possessing this knowledge, but in order that the possession of this divine knowledge may arouse us to love Him more fervently.

Therefore, when the Holy Spirit through the consideration of the truths which have been revealed to us, awakens in us a movement of love, we should immediately yield to it. We should cease our intellectual consideration for the time being, and engage ourselves in spontaneous acts of love to Him. In these exercises of love there must be no inhibiting self-consciousness, no shamefaced drawing back from His wooing, but we should fling ourselves with complete abandonment into the current of this Godward impulse of love. We must not hesitate to speak to Him out of our hearts with the fervent, intimate familiarity with which little children prattle loving nothings to a tender father or mother. In no relationship is it more necessary to remember the words of our Lord, "Except ye become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" <sup>1</sup>. The formality and reticence of the intellectual exercise is to be swept aside, and love allowed to have its way.

The acts of love are to be continued as long as possible. When they begin to lag, and distraction intervenes, we may return to our meditation, taking it up where we left off. Should the impulse be

<sup>1</sup> St Matt xviii 3

given us again, again should we apply ourselves to these prayers, ejaculations and heart-cries of affection. As experience develops, the occasions will become more frequent, and if we are faithful in our response, more and more will our devotions tend to pass from mental considerations into the exercise of an ever purer and stronger love.

In proportion as this process continues, we shall find ourselves less inclined to extended reasoning on divine subjects. The theme will awaken less of intellectual interest, and we shall be content to comprehend it in a more general way. Its consideration will enkindle the heart to love rather than stir the mind to think. We shall, as time goes on, reflect less and less, and love more and more, as St Teresa counsels.

We shall consider certain perils which attend meditation, and it will be necessary to take warning also against the dangers that lie in the path of affective prayer. The emotions are always a point of danger. Emotion, feeling, should never be permitted to govern us, but this does not mean that we may not quite safely make a right use of the emotions, and they have a special place in affective prayer. They often project us, as it were, on our way; but to depend on them, to make acts of the affections only when "we feel like it," would be fatal indeed. The remedy against this danger "consists in the profound conviction that the love of God is centred in the will rather than in the feelings; that the generosity of that love does not consist in vehement emotional transports, but in a calm and determined purpose of refusing nothing to Almighty God. Let us bear in mind that love is an act of the will. No doubt it does react on the feelings, and excites more or less lively emotions, yet these do

not constitute the essence of true devotion, they are but accidental manifestations thereof, which must remain subject to the will and must be regulated by it. In the absence of this control the emotions gain the ascendancy (which means disorder), and instead of fostering solid piety, they make it degenerate into sentimental love. We must therefore strive to spiritualize our affections, to moderate them, and to press them into the service of the will " 1

If our meditations have really taught us the value of things divine, the will, as well as the feelings, will be powerfully moved, and we shall be held steadfast in our prayer by the Holy Ghost, who will act upon the will. Herein lies our safety, for though the force of feeling be quickly lost, the will once set to its task is not so easily discouraged. It will continue the work of affective prayer long after the feelings have grown weary and have retired from the field.

One excellent method of testing whether the feelings or the will at such times is uppermost, is to let our affective prayer take the form, not of direct acts of love, hope, joy and desire, which might so easily find their root in the lower and self-pleasing side of our nature, but of penitence, of shame and confusion because of our sins, of self-humiliation, of resignation to suffering or disappointment, and other like acts which have no root in the natural heart, and to which the lower nature is averse.

Still another danger in the practice of affective prayer is that of imagining that because our expressions of devotion seem warm and spontaneous, we must, therefore, be making great progress in the spiritual course. Our security here will lie in treating every

<sup>1</sup> A Tanquary, *The Spiritual Life*, No 986

such suggestion as a direct temptation to spiritual pride, and dealing with it accordingly. We are to reject the thought, and seek diligently to divert the mind from it. We should remember that spiritual dryness is a surer sign of advance than a melting sweetness of spirit.

But the best security against any dangers whatsoever that may beset the way of prayer is to follow studiously the counsel of the masters, all of whom tell us that with whatever kinds of prayer we may be using we must combine frequent petitions for God's grace and protection. Prayer is a dangerous occupation, and the higher the form of the prayer, the greater the peril. The tempter is never complacent when he sees an earnest soul engaged in prayer. If our endeavour is of any worth he is almost certain to attack us. Our safety is to be found in interspersing all our prayers with supplications for the divine aid, asking especially that we may have the particular graces that may be necessary for the work we have in hand at the time.

As we have seen, affective prayer arises out of our meditations, and we are to yield always to the impulse to pause in our course of thinking, and substitute acts of the affections. But when are we justified in deliberately withdrawing ourselves from meditation and setting the will definitely and resolutely to the practice of affective prayer? We are given three signs, and they should not be difficult of recognition, although it would be safe, certainly wherever we are in doubt, to submit them to the judgment of a spiritual director of skill and experience in such matters.

The first sign is present when the convictions we need to acquire by meditation are so well rooted that we are able to recall them with facility, and when we

find temptations against them to be easily held in check, even if not wholly put to flight, by a fervent act of faith. The second sign is found in the strong and increasing tendency to cease the work of reason and consideration. This sign is of especial value when this tendency is seen to be combined with a readiness to pass quickly to such prayers and ejaculations as are expressive of the affections. The third sign is indispensable. When the attention is withdrawn from the ordinary activities of our state of life, do we find the heart quickly and easily drawn to loving thoughts of God? If this is the case, then we are warranted in deliberately withdrawing from meditation and giving the time to acts of affection, during as much of the assigned period as possible.

We are not, however, to conclude that facility in affective prayer is an indication that we are to give up meditation altogether. There is no spiritual state in which meditation is not a sure aid to advance. Even those who are lifted up to the loftiest heights of contemplation must return to meditation from time to time, for it is through the knowledge acquired in these intellectual considerations of God and His revelation of Himself, that we find new and ever richer materials for affective and contemplative prayer.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See St. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love*, p. 75. References to St. John in this book are to the translation of the Critical Edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D., edited by Professor E. Allison Peers (Burns & Oates), but in some cases where the meaning is the same, I have retained the much smoother English version of David Lewis.

## CHAPTER VII

### MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION

WHEN we come to consider the two remaining forms of prayer, we can secure a clearer understanding of their nature if we make a comparative study of the two methods, meditation and contemplation, considering them together<sup>1</sup> Constant comparative study is, in fact, necessary to an understanding of any mode of prayer, for, as we have seen, it is not possible to draw hard-and-fast lines between any of the methods of ordinary prayer, as they are continually overlapping each other There are certain manifestations of mystical prayer, raptures, ecstasies, etc., which are extraordinary in their nature, and it is not our purpose to deal with them. These states and occupations are in God's hands, and He gives them to those for whom He has prepared them. They are in no wise necessary to sanctification, and no man, however exalted in his holiness, has any rights in them There is abundant testimony that certain of the saintliest of men and women had no experience with them, and that, on the

<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered that meditation, as we commonly think of it to-day, i.e. a formal method, involving a set subject, points for consideration, a set time and duration, etc., was unknown to the Church for fifteen hundred years As practised to-day it seems to have had its beginnings amongst the Brothers of the Common Life in the Low Countries at the end of the fifteenth century None of the old religious Orders provides for it in their Rules See Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, p. 37 ff, for the history of its development

other hand, they are sometimes given to those whose lives would seem to be less devoted to the high service of God. Experience and observation also show that they cannot be deliberately sought after without peril of pride and presumption. Nor are the authorities by any means unanimous in allowing that such experiences belong to the highest walks of prayer. Father Barbanson describing out of his own experiences what he calls "a rapture or an ecstasy" speaks deprecatingly of it as "rather to be avoided than desired, since divine union may well be had without such exterior effects." He goes on to say that "it is a sign that the soul, as far as her innermost part is concerned, is in a very low degree, though as regards her attention to spiritual things she is highly upraised" <sup>1</sup>

It will be well for us to digress for a moment from our immediate subject to explain what is meant by "extraordinary" as the word is used in spiritual parlance. It does not mean that which is rare and unusual, but that which is *extra ordinem*, outside of or beyond that which is appointed as part of the common, divinely prepared order, even the highest degrees of that order. Everything which belongs to the full development of the life of sanctification is ordinary. The Beatific Vision is ordinary, not extraordinary, because it is the normal culmination of the life of grace which is to be lived by all men. Therefore, since the Beatific Vision is ordered and prepared as an eternal life of contemplation for all men, the contemplative life in this world is likewise ordinary, not extraordinary. The fact that few attain to it has nothing to do with its nature, any more than the fact that many fail to attain the Beatific

<sup>1</sup> Barbanson, *The Secret Paths of Divine Love*, pp. 167, 168, (Orchard Books)



Vision makes it an extraordinary thing for those who do attain. It is in the sense here described that we use the word *extraordinary*.

We must keep in mind that neither contemplation, meditation, nor any other form of prayer constitutes sanctity. These forms of devotion are rather both the effect and the cause of holiness. He who out of a holy life loves God will desire and seek to enjoy a union with Him, and this will sooner or later produce contemplation in some degree. Such will be the effect of even a limited degree of holiness. But contemplation once entered upon will act as a cause, and will continue to produce, in ever-ascending scale, the holiness of life which is the aim of all spiritual endeavour.

To return to our comparative study, we note that meditation and contemplation are spiritual exercises through the use of which any soul is able to enter into intimate communion with God. They are special forms of prayer, and prayer is any loving communication between the soul and God, whether God be speaking or the soul be speaking. We are familiar with the precious examples of this in the *Imitation of Christ*, in the colloquies in which the "Voice of the Beloved" and the "Voice of the Disciple" speak antiphonally.

We would travel far, however, before finding a better definition of prayer in general than that which was given nearly a thousand years ago by the long unknown author of the famous letter addressed to the monks of the Carthusian Monastery of Mons Dei in France, which has been preserved in the works of St Bernard, and which for a long time was thought to have been written by the great abbot of Clairvaux<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In a study published in the *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* in 1924, Dom Wilmart produces evidence which seems to show this

This devout instructor of souls tells us that "prayer is the loving union of the soul with God, a tender and familiar converse, and a repose of the spirit, which, illuminated by the light of grace, enjoys as long as possible the divine sweetness" In order to understand the nature of prayer we could do no better than to enter, each one for himself, upon a detailed consideration of this definition, clause by clause It covers as wide an area as perhaps can be found in any other definition that the literature of the Church offers

Whether they take the form of adoration, of praise and thanksgiving, or confession or petition, or whatever sort they be, spiritual exercises must in some degree conform to this definition if they are to be worthy to be called prayer in any real sense I insert it at this point because it seems to apply especially to the form of prayer of contemplation which we are about to study It is valuable also to insert it here because we are also to consider meditation, and there is little question that much meditation, so called, is mere intellectual study, and has scarcely any element of prayer in it which could be conformed to this definition Meditation which is not filled with familiar converse with God may be profitable as the study of a sacred subject, but it is not prayer<sup>1</sup> In this chapter when we speak of meditation we mean only that form of discursive prayer which is really a "tender and familiar converse" with God, a prayer the dominant element of which is love

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letter to have been written by St Bernard's friend, William of St. Thierry

<sup>1</sup> This subject receives an informing treatment in Dr Kirk's *The Vision of God*, pp 440-41

The two forms of devotion, meditation and contemplation, have in all ages constituted the major part of the spiritual curriculum of the faithful. We must emphasize the distinction between them. In what is called meditation we commonly employ the intellectual faculty in such manner that, using the knowledge of God which we already possess, whether it be little or much, we are able to acquire further knowledge of Him. Meditation is exercised chiefly by reasoning, by intellectual considerations, through which we seek to discover and fathom the truth. It is based upon our present personal knowledge of God, and seeks primarily to increase that knowledge.

Meditation, as commonly taught, includes all the processes of mind and heart and will. The intellect weighs and considers the subject, marshals the facts, and develops and sets them in logical order. The imagination pictures the scene, the affections are stirred to activity, and the will operates to produce and carry out a resolution to do something, or to be something, as a consequence of the illuminating knowledge or stimulus which has been imparted by the meditation.

Meditation, because of its intellectual character, has its special perils. To those who are proficient in such things there are few greater pleasures than intellectual gymnastics, and meditation is always in danger of losing its spiritual quality and lapsing into this category. Such lapsing, where it really takes place, removes it wholly from the sphere of prayer. It becomes mere speculation. There is another danger which besets particularly the path of those whose duty it is to instruct others in spiritual things. Those who are called upon to teach, often think they are making





are permissible since His Human Nature, having been taken up into the Godhead at the Incarnation, has a place in the category of divine things

St John of the Cross outlines the difference between meditation and contemplation in an informing series of comparisons. He says: "The difference between the operation of these two faculties in the soul is like the difference between working and enjoying the fruit of work which has been done, or like that between the labour of journeying and the rest and quiet which comes with arrival at the goal, between preparing a meal and partaking and tasting of it"<sup>1</sup>

Contemplation, therefore, is not a conscious seeking after truth through mental processes so much as it is the enjoyment of the truth which we already possess, a dwelling upon it with admiration and delight. It must, however, be more than a mere admiration and delight such as one might exercise in regard to something in nature in an impersonal way. Contemplation is prayer, and prayer must be a personal communication with God in the power of love, as we have seen in the definition given by the holy monk of Mons Dei. A child resting at peace in its mother's arms has often been cited as an illustration of contemplation, but the child is not making a study of the mother's character, nor is it merely contemplating her as a source of joy and satisfaction; it is rejoicing in her loving embrace, and giving love for love.

In contemplation the soul offers itself all joyously to the Spirit of God to be led whither He wills, not himself acting so much as being acted upon by the Holy Ghost, not using grace in any conscious

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II ch. xiv 7

deliberate way, but rather being used by the Spirit of grace<sup>1</sup> "It does little and receives much. Its work is delightful, yet most productive"<sup>2</sup> The will is intensely active, but it is with an activity which consists chiefly in holding the mind and heart wide open as the interior gaze is fixed on God, that God may enter in and take possession. It has been compared to gazing in rapt manner at a beautiful scene in nature, but there is a deep difference that cannot be lost sight of. In gazing upon a sunset, I get from it what I bring to it; it gives expression to me of what is already within me. In contemplation, on the other hand, in my gaze upon God I get from Him rich and unsearchable things which He pours into the waiting soul.

There is a fine passage quoted by Dr. Kirk from Richard of St. Victor which throws light on the distinction we have been considering. "Reflection wanders up and down with leisurely pace through every by-way, heedless of any goal to its journey. Meditation seeks the heights, rugged though they may often be; and presses on to its destination with intense concentration of purpose. But contemplation rises up with wings in free flight, and flies down the wind with speed to make men marvel. Reflection can only creep; meditation walks, and often runs withal; contemplation soars through the heavens. Reflection wanders from one disconnected impression to

<sup>1</sup> "A young Greek priest was talking to a Western fellow-student about the nature of religion. 'I cannot understand what you Westerners mean by religion,' he said, 'you seem to be always wanting to *do* something for God. Our idea of religion is just the opposite. It is to be still before God, and let Him do for us'"—William Adams Brown, *Beliefs that Matter*, p. 82

<sup>2</sup> Bossuet, *Manière courte et facile pour faire l'oraison*

another; meditation concentrates on a single subject, contemplation from its place of vantage sees all things in a single glance.”<sup>1</sup>

While the aim of these two forms of prayer, meditation and contemplation, can be readily distinguished, it is not so easy to differentiate them in their actual exercise. Just as we have seen that there is no worthy vocal prayer which is not accompanied by some degree of mental prayer or meditation, in like manner it is difficult to conceive of any real meditation that does not in some sense and degree involve contemplation. If we set the mind prayerfully upon some saying of our Lord's, upon some event in His life, or upon some special manifestation of His goodness and love to us, and by serious intellectual consideration of it gain some new knowledge of Him, as that ray of knowledge flashes from the Heart of God into our hearts, it will be impossible not to stop our reasoning for a space, and regard Him with loving gratitude and adoration. This act of loving enjoyment of what has been taught us is contemplation in the sense in which we are using the term. It is a turning from the intellectual satisfaction which is found in the gift, to a rejoicing in the love and goodness of the Giver. The soul that yields itself more and more to this contemplative interruption of the intellectual meditation, and holds that attitude of contemplation for longer and longer periods as time goes on, is actually learning how to contemplate, and little by little it becomes a proficient in contemplative prayer. Such interruptions of our meditations are, therefore, to be encouraged and yielded to.

Not infrequently in this way an earnest, loving

<sup>1</sup> K. E. Kirk, *The Vision of God*, p. 375



meditation, or even theological study, may pass wholly into the prayer of contemplation. Something akin to this must have been in the mind of Jeremy Taylor, who is said to have counselled his disciples as to their study, "Read little, pray much." There are cases not a few in the history of the saints where men of profound intellect and great learning have, through the intellectual study of theology, been so overwhelmed with love and joy at the truths their intellects perceived, that their reasoning faculties became submerged for the time being in the great flood of holy wonder which broke over them in the presence of the deep secrets which God had made clear to their minds. Under these influences such men have become great contemplatives, and some have been given even the supreme favours of rapture and ecstasy in the mystical union with God which they were able to attain. Prominent amongst these were, for example, St Thomas Aquinas and St Bonaventura. St Thomas was perhaps the greatest intellect that has adorned the Church since St Augustine. As dogmatic theologian and Christian philosopher he made a vast contribution to the scientific, intellectual understanding of the Faith, but his study produced for him such a wealth of material for pure contemplation that few saints have enjoyed so rich a measure of the vision of God as was given to him in the midst of his stern scholastic labours.

Some element of the discursive mental process may, on the other hand, break into one's prayer of contemplation, but valuable as this might be in itself, it would constitute, strictly speaking, an interruption of the higher work of contemplation. But such interruptions are by no means to be regarded as always undesirable. Only the most exalted saints, and very few of them, have been capable of such sustained acts

of the will as can produce contemplation for very extended periods of time. The mind may, and often does, turn back to intellectual reasoning and ordinary reflection, and in so doing—if it be not the result of sloth of the will in failing to maintain the contemplative attitude—it is but gathering new materials for further periods of loving contemplation of God. It is but a deepening and augmenting of that knowledge which will enable it to contemplate God with clearer gaze.

Meditation, and other lower and intermediate forms of prayer, therefore, are not to be despised or lightly set aside, for they constitute the preparation which is necessary for contemplation. St John of the Cross enjoins, "Seek by reading, and you will find by meditation; cry in prayer, and the door will be opened in contemplation",<sup>1</sup> while Guigo the Carthusian, in his *Scala Claustralium*, tells us that "reading seeks the happiness of the life of the blessed, meditation discovers it, prayer asks for it, contemplation enjoys it." These are the four rungs of his "Ladder of the Cloister." The happiness of the blessed consists of love—love which in its nature is not critical, but gracious, peaceful and trustful. St Francis de Sales teaches that "we meditate upon God's goodness to excite our wills to love Him, but that love once aroused in the heart, we contemplate the same goodness in order to satisfy our love, which can never have enough of gazing upon its object." He concludes his argument with the beautiful thought that "meditation is the mother of love, and contemplation the daughter."<sup>2</sup>

St Francis is definite in his teaching that spiritual exercises of every kind have contemplation as their goal. "Forasmuch as in order to attain to contempla-

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *Spiritual Maxims*, 64

<sup>2</sup> St Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, VI 3

tion men need the help of hearing God's Word, of spiritual communing one with another, of reading devout books, of prayer, meditation, singing Offices, pondering good thoughts, all these have that end in view, and those who give themselves up to such pursuits we call contemplatives, and the life they lead, the contemplative life" <sup>1</sup>

Meditation, unlike affective prayer, might, in certain cases, be regarded as a permanent method of devotion, for many truly consecrated souls never pass beyond it in this world; yet those who seek constant progress in the spiritual life will hardly be content to linger permanently or indefinitely in it, unless it be very clear that such is the will of God. There are so many sweet allurements to contemplation that the soul must ever tend towards it, and of whatever kind our meditation may be, and however long it be necessary for us to continue in it, we must not lose sight of the fact that even at its best and highest it is a means to an end, whether that end be attained in this world or the next. It is a stepping-stone to contemplation, as St Bernard says,<sup>2</sup> and a stepping-stone, from the nature of it, is not that upon which one takes up a permanent station.

As a matter of almost certain fact, there are very few souls who are earnest in their work of meditation, who do not, at least from time to time, find a taste of the joy of contemplation, even though it be for but a brief period, and though they are hardly conscious of it. If one never got beyond the discursive prayer of meditation, at least for a few minutes, it would be regarded as a case where normal advance had ceased, like a soldier who, however alert and at attention he may be, is merely marking time. St. John of the

<sup>1</sup> St Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, VI 6

<sup>2</sup> St. Bernard, *De Consideratione*, V. 2

Cross leaves no room for doubt in the matter of his description of meditation. It "tends to contemplation," he says, "as a means to an end. But when the end is attained, the means are laid aside, men rest at the end of their journey, thus when the state of contemplation has been attained, meditation must cease" <sup>1</sup> St John is also explicit in showing that this passage from meditation to contemplation, which is normally to be looked for, is a gradual process, a merging, at times almost imperceptibly, of meditation into contemplation. Speaking of detachment from the world by dint of meditation, he says, "When this is *in some degree* effected, God *begins at once* to introduce the soul into a state of contemplation" <sup>2</sup> The words which I have italicized show that contemplation begins before meditation ceases. The required detachment partly effected, contemplation proceeds in proportion as the work of meditation is transcended, and this beginning of contemplation he describes not as the act of man, but as the act of God, who "is now secretly and quietly infusing wisdom into the soul, together with the loving knowledge of Himself, without many divers distinct or separate acts" <sup>3</sup>

To sum up. Meditation, then, is the means, contemplation the end. No wise soul will despise the way that leads to the desired end. As the author of the *Imitation* says, "Without the way there is no going" <sup>4</sup> Contemplation depends upon the operation of personal love, and upon the action of the will. The Abbé Saudreau declares that it is "by pious reflection and arguments"—which are the substance of meditation

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *Spiritual Maxims*, 242 (Lewis)

- <sup>2</sup> *Idem*, *The Living Flame of Love*, p. 76

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, *ibid.*, p. 77

<sup>4</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *De Imitatione Christi*

—"that the will is moved and the heart filled with lively affections" <sup>1</sup> In another place the same author teaches us that those who with humility and reverence pursue a course of attentive meditation, all the while being faithful in mortification and recollection, and frequenting the Sacraments with diligence and devotion, reach the point where "they have no need of lengthy reasonings which only cause them fatigue and tedium, they tend always, with an ever-increasing desire, to the love of God, to praise and magnify Him, to unite with Him, to rejoice in His perfections, to conform to His holy will, to long that He may be known, loved and glorified everywhere and by all men" <sup>2</sup>

In this lies the whole perfection of our Christian life and work, both in relation to God and to our fellow-men. In this lies the whole missionary dynamic, for if we truly love God we shall love what He loves, as was said by St. Catherine of Siena "I love what He loves and hate what He hates, for Love hath made me one with himself" Thus dominated by the divine Love, we shall seek to satisfy His love by bringing to Him the souls whom He loved even unto death. This is why the great missionaries have been great contemplatives.

"Happy, therefore," says the great saint of Annecy, "are those who, after having proposed to themselves the different motives calculated to excite the love of God, substitute the simple view of the mind in place of multiplied reasoning and reflections, and reducing their thoughts to one which includes all others, establish themselves in the unity of contemplation" <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saudreau, *The Life of Union with God*, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> *Idem, ibid*, p. 6

<sup>3</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, VI. 5

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CHARACTER OF CONTEMPLATION

VARIOUS terms have been used to describe this form of prayer. It has been called "the prayer of simplicity," and this is perhaps the best term to use. The word simplicity is here used in contradistinction to complexity, the latter having to do with the more or less intricate processes of reasoning which are involved in meditation, while contemplation is a simple, uninvolved fixing of the inner eye on God. Being a direct attention to God, this method simplifies our prayer, reducing it to the fewest possible terms.

The first step in this process of simplification consists in the diminution, and finally in the suppression, of acts of the imagination, and of reasoning and argument. Later on, the affections undergo a like simplification which reduces, and eventually eliminates, mere emotional impulses, and gives the will, governed by the Holy Spirit, the opportunity of directing all that is done. Finally, the whole life becomes a simple waiting upon God, until there is no thought or action which is not governed by the same spirit of love and faith. The eye of the soul is opened towards God in a childlike gaze of love, thinking nought and reasoning nought, but waiting in a complete trust for Him to fill it with Himself, even as when the eye of the body is opened wide towards the sun, its light floods in and illuminates it to the full.

Many other names have been applied to this kind of prayer. It has been called "the prayer of loving attention to God," and as a descriptive title this has much in it which commends it. Again, it is called "the prayer of the heart," as contrasted with meditation, which employs the intellect to so great an extent. Again, we find the term, "prayer of simple regard," the whole soul being fixed in a rapt gaze, "purely, simply and lovingly intent upon God," as St John of the Cross expresses it<sup>1</sup>. Father de Besse prefers to call it the "prayer of faith," because it is, like faith, neither reflective nor argumentative, but supposes a childlike acceptance of whatever God sends, without reasoning or inquiring about it. He describes it as "a simple gaze fixed upon God present in the soul, together with a complete surrender into His hands by an unbounded love and childlike trust"<sup>2</sup>. These words might seem an extension of St Augustine's saying about St John the Divine—" *Lucis internæ atque æternæ fixis oculis contemplator*, He was with steady gaze the contemplator of the inner and eternal Light"<sup>3</sup>.

With his usual clearness and exactness of statement, Bossuet gives us a summary of the whole matter which is worth quoting in full. He says, "One must accustom oneself to nourish the soul by a simple, loving gaze on God and on Jesus Christ. To attain this result, one must gently free the soul from reasonings, from arguments, and from the multitude of affections, in order to keep it simple, attentive and respectful, and thus have it draw closer and closer to God, its first principle and its last end . . . Meditation is very good

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, III 36

<sup>2</sup> De Besse, *The Science of Prayer*, p 47

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine, *In Joan Evang*, Tract XXXVI 5

at the proper time, and very useful at the beginning of the spiritual life, but one must not stop there, since the soul by fidelity to mortification and recollection ordinarily becomes the recipient of a purer and a more intimate kind of prayer which one may call the prayer of simplicity, and which consists in a simple view, regard or loving thought of some divine object, be it God Himself or some of His mysteries, or any other Christian truth. The soul puts aside reasoning, and employs a gentle contemplation which keeps it at peace, attentive and docile to the divine operations, and to the impressions which the Holy Ghost communicates. It does little and receives much, its labour is sweet, yet very fruitful, and since it approaches nearer to the source of all light, of all grace and of all virtue, it receives a still greater share in all these gifts”<sup>1</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas, with his characteristic conciseness, is content with a brief expression, declaring contemplation to be “a simple, unimpeded, and penetrating gaze on truth”<sup>2</sup>. St. Francis de Sales, happy as always in his definitions of spiritual things, sums it up in one luminous sentence “Contemplation is no other thing than a loving, simple and permanent attention of the spirit to divine things”<sup>3</sup>.

We do not need to multiply definitions, but that given by St. Chantal in her description of mystical prayer is of too great value to pass over, especially as her spiritual doctrine came directly from St. Francis de Sales, who was for many years her director. She is describing her third way of prayer, the other two

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, *Manière courte et facile pour faire l'oraison*,

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, 2 a, 2 ae, Q. 180, Arts 1, 2, and 3

<sup>3</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, VI 3



being meditation and affective prayer. The third method, which she clearly differentiates from both meditation and affective prayer, is, she says, "to keep ourselves simply in God's presence, gazing on Him in some mystery with the eye of faith, and conversing with Him in words full of confidence, heart to heart, yet so secretly as if we would not have even our guardian angel know of it. When you are in dryness, and seem unable to say a single word, do not stop talking to Him, but say, 'Lord, I am poor, dry earth where no water is; give Thy grace to this poor heart.' Then remain respectfully in His presence without any worrying, or being disquieted for any dryness that may happen"<sup>1</sup>

We are considering, as we have already pointed out, a kind of prayer which is to be practised in every walk of life. There are certain Religious Orders which profess what is called "the contemplative life," in which much of this form of prayer is found. But it must be kept in mind that contemplative prayer is not to be thought of as confined, or especially pertaining to, those who dwell in the cloister, or to those who pursue quiet and protected lives. Indeed many of these, such as the Benedictines, who, according to their Rule and tradition, are contemplatives, engage in constant and active labours outside their cloister. It is to be taken almost for a certainty that in the present condition of the Religious Life amongst us, the great majority of souls engaged in this kind of prayer—and I believe there are many, not a few of whom are unaware of their own spiritual development—live in the rush

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, Vol. II, *Conf* 32. Quoted by Saudreau in *The Mystical Prayer of St. Jane de Chantal*. For a rich list of definitions gathered from many sources, see Farges, *Mystical Phenomena*, p. 53.

of the secular world, occupied continually with the common duties of family and business life Dom Butler, in summing up the teaching of the Fathers, says that "the test of a contemplative life does not lie in the absence of activity but in the presence of contemplation" <sup>1</sup>

It is significant that one of the great spiritual classics of the ages, *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, by St Francis de Sales, containing as it does the profoundest instruction on the highest things of the soul, was written originally for Madame de Charmois, a wife and mother, the head of a large household, whose position in the world filled her days with an exacting round of social duties which to most of us would seem to make any life of special devotion difficult, and a life involving higher forms of prayer, such as we are considering, wholly impossible

But though it is indeed a higher and purer form of prayer, contemplation is also marked with a simplicity which to earnest and recollected souls makes it easier than many other modes of devotion St Gregory the Great (A.D. 604) was the first of the Fathers of the Church to deal with the subject in the terms we are accustomed to use "He did not look on contemplation as a nearly superhuman thing, one of the rarest of graces On the contrary, he believed it to be within the reach of all men of good will who give themselves seriously to prayer, and keep due guard upon their hearts" <sup>2</sup> The words of this saint are so clear that they do not admit of any misunderstanding "It is not the case," he says, "that the grace of contemplation is given to the highest and not to the lowest, it is given

<sup>1</sup> Butler, *Western Mysticism*, p. 323

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, *Benedictine Monachism*, p. 100

both to one and to the other, and very often not only to those who have renounced the world, but also to those who live in the world in the married estate. If, therefore, there is no state of life of the faithful from which the grace of contemplation can be excluded, anyone who keeps guard over his heart may be illumined by this light of contemplation.”<sup>1</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Homilies of St. Gregory, which contain so much of his teaching on this subject, were not addressed to the few, or to monks in a monastery who were called to a special life of prayer, but were delivered in church to the general congregation of men and women who gathered out of the streets and from their homes to hear the instruction of a popular and beloved teacher. It is again significant that he requires as a part of the ordinary, normal equipment of all pastors that they should know the light of heavenly contemplation.<sup>2</sup>

He, therefore, whose heart is not irradiated with this celestial light, suffers this lack from no other reason than that he has slothfully refused to make the effort required. We have to charge it to ourselves if we have never experienced the sweetness of contemplation. St. Gregory will not allow that the call to contemplative prayer is other than the call given to every soul. He does not regard it as an alternative to any other life, or form of devotion. Every soul is called to salvation, and salvation in the end brings everyone to the life of contemplation of God in heaven. This is, at the last, the only vocation; it is the only spiritual goal. While many in this life may have temperamental difficulties, and should approach it with discretion, none the less

<sup>1</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezekiel*, Bk. II, v. 19

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, *Regula Pastoralis*, II. 5

are they to approach it, and the sooner this inevitable work is entered upon the better

This teaching is in line with that of the great masters, who, from the beginning, have presented this higher form of prayer as a normal possibility for every soul. In every one of his epistles St Paul presents the loftiest models of sanctity to ordinary work-a-day folk. In the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians, discussing the interior life, he calls them to witness "how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought the things that are"<sup>1</sup> In like manner St. John's most sublime teaching was addressed to the rank and file of Christians everywhere and in all walks of life

There are in the world many devout, but ignorant and unlearned, folk who have had little mental training, and who are consequently incapable of making a meditation which demands much of the reason. They are often unable to think for any considerable length of time logically and consecutively. They do not possess trained minds, and a mind trained in some degree is necessary to discursive meditation, for meditation is a species of study, and a knowledge of how to study is requisite to it. But they are well able to contemplate God with a simple gaze of love.

As we shall see in a later chapter, our spiritual teachers are practically unanimous in making con-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor 1 26-28

templation the fruit which is produced in the soul by the normal operation of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Now these Gifts are the universal endowment of Christians. Everyone who has received the Sacraments which are ordained by Christ for the sanctification of His people has, of necessity, received the Gifts of the Spirit, and if these Gifts are cultivated as God intends that they shall be in every instance, this fruit of contemplation must be the inevitable consequence.

There is found a consensus amongst many of the Church's greatest teachers to the effect that through a certain higher action of the Gifts of the Spirit, God invites, and makes it possible for, all spiritually-minded men to walk in this way, and to lose themselves in transports of love. It is a service of prayer to which every soul should aspire. It is a service in which love leads the soul to forget self, and to think only on God. It develops in the soul "a sweet and familiar contemplation of heavenly things, intellectual and divine, in which are drunk with pleasure deep draughts of the hidden and sacred meanings of wisdom and truth", <sup>1</sup> and these deep draughts are possible only because reason, which can grasp only things inferior to itself, is transcended, and the soul is enabled, through the exercise of love, to attain to that which is above itself, namely a loving intimacy with God, and the enjoyment of experiences with the essential Being of God Himself, profound beyond the power of finite intellect to describe or define. Contemplation is, therefore, seen not to be for the chosen few, according to these teachers. The fact that comparatively few have attained to it is only a sad commentary on the failure of men to walk in the path set so directly before them.

<sup>1</sup> St Bernard, *Canticles*, XXXV 2.

There are timorous souls who shrink from contemplation just because it seems to require so little action and thought. They fear it may involve them in sloth. But the contrary is the truth. There enters here the principle which must apply in every sphere where good work is to be done—limit your work. Those who choose a few things and concentrate all their powers on them are the ones who reach the greater achievement. The same principle applies in prayer. It is often the case that men dissipate their spiritual energies through undertaking many and complex things in their life of prayer, nervously passing from one to another before any proficiency is reached in the first, thus living a life of prayer which may have many sides but no depth at any point. The concentration of all the faculties on a single point produces the most perfect results, and so far from being a drawback, it is this simplicity and consequent intensity of concentration upon God which ensures our reaching the highest and best in our spiritual life.

On the other hand, there are those who draw back from the thought of contemplative prayer because they think that it demands high intellectual powers, and who, in a false though quite sincere humility, arising out of their ignorance, believe that they are not equal to such lofty things. But this is just what contemplation does not demand. Those who seek contemplation are not to be fearful lest they be intellectually presumptuous. St Thomas Aquinas, for the comfort of such humble souls, explains that the state of perfection into which the episcopal or monastic profession initiates one is not so called because the soul has become perfect, but from the intention regarding the aim and end, and the special means of grace and progress to which those

absence of mortal sin; 2. The absence of attachment to venial sin, 3. A hatred of all spiritual imperfection; 4. The habit of concentration of the attention; 5. Diligent use of the Sacraments.

1. In the first place, there must be, as a matter of course, no mortal sin on the soul. A mortal sin is defined as a violation of the known will of God under circumstances where the act shows three characteristics. First, the matter in itself must be serious, second, there must be adequate knowledge of its nature, and third, it must be committed with purpose and deliberation. One who under these conditions violates the will of God cuts himself off deliberately from all grace. Ordinary sanctifying grace is necessary before one can take any forward step in the exercise of the spiritual life, and there can no grace dwell where mortal sin reigns. It is enough to state this requirement without going on to discuss it. Its truth must be clear to all.

2. In the second place, the contemplative soul must be free from the love of any venial sin. It is hardly conceivable that a soul which genuinely desires to contemplate God in love could permit itself to be in a state of offence against Him in a serious issue, knowing it to be serious, and persisting in it deliberately. The soul which is really in earnest, loving God and desiring to love Him always more and more, and trying ever to express that love in service, such a soul with the Christ-ideal ever before it, and constantly fortified by the grace of the Sacraments, should not find it difficult to avoid mortal sin, but venial sin is another matter. Not even the highest saint would dare to say that venial sin did not from time to time enter his life. Much venial sin which mars the lives of even the best of men

brain are requisite thereto, but only a strong courageous affection of the heart " 1

This old Benedictine master says in another place that contemplation is not to be thought of as confined " to solitary Religious Communities, nor appropriated to the subtlety of wit, profoundness of judgment, gifts of learning or study; but that the poorest, simplest soul living in the world, and following the common life of good Christians there, if she will faithfully correspond to the internal light and tracts afforded her by God's Spirit, may as securely, yea, and sometimes more speedily, arrive to the top of the mountain of vision than the most learned doctors " 2

He who having the love of God in his heart cultivates a spirit of concentration, and by simple, strong acts of the will holds the attention fixed upon God, has all the equipment necessary for contemplation. As Father Baker insists, neither learning nor mental ability count in this affair. Indeed, with many souls the contrary might easily be true. We note that Father Baker says that holy but ignorant souls " sometimes more speedily arrive to the top of the mountain of vision than the most learned doctors " The reason is not far to seek. A broad intellectual outlook, much learning and erudition, wide literary knowledge of a general character, with that inquiring and analytical turn of which almost always accompanies great knowledge and mental development, are apt to prove a foe to contemplation. These conditions may carry with them greater powers of concentration when it comes to research, but they are also usually accompanied by intellectual curiosity and spirit of inves-



in these states vow themselves. He shows that one who enters the schools calls himself a scholar, not thereby declaring himself to have attained to scholarship, but that he is desirous of acquiring learning, and is faithfully using the means necessary to such acquisition<sup>1</sup>. In like manner those in the contemplative life are not claiming to have attained the heights of prayer, but are seeking the life which may be shared by all who have this great aim ever before them, and who are diligently walking in the way, doing the things which make steadily for that end.

Mgr Farges gives the same testimony. "Simple souls without great culture," he says, "find themselves in God's presence content with few ideas and a deep sense of that presence. On the contrary, great theologians and preachers abound in ideas, reasonings and texts, and cannot settle down to this simplicity"<sup>2</sup>. And Dr Kirk gives us the consoling reminder that reason is not "the only road to truth," and declares that "contemplation is something far more human than the subtleties of the scholar"<sup>3</sup>.

Father Augustine Baker deals again and again with this point, using it as his ground for commending contemplation to souls of every type. "Experience demonstrates," he says, "that all the most sublime exercises of contemplation may as purely and perfectly be performed by persons the most ignorant and unlearned (so they be sufficiently instructed in the fundamental doctrines of Catholic faith) as by the learnedst doctors, inasmuch as not any abilities in the

to<sup>1</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, 2 a, 2 ae, Q 186, Art 2,  
 at<sup>1</sup> Farges, *Mystical Phenomena*, p 42  
 of Dr Kirk, *The Vision of God*, p 391

brain are requisite thereto, but only a strong courageous affection of the heart." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 39

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 136

tigation which may multiply indefinitely the possibilities of distraction. Numberless avenues are continually open to allure the developed and learned mind with temptations to wander away from the immediate thought of God. These avenues are naturally closed to simpler and more ignorant minds. They know but one direct, strait and narrow path of prayer, and that leads them swiftly to the feet of God.

Farges expresses this principle well. "Once these heights are reached where the air is so pure," he says, "we are able to realize the advantages they have for the heart and mind as well as for the will, in their striving after God and their perfect union. The heart feels itself more free to unbosom itself to God because it is no longer taken up with reasoning and intellectual preoccupations. Sentiment is sometimes stifled by logic and syllogism."

But the intellect is not to be disregarded, for while no longer dominating the situation, it has its part in laying the foundations, and it shares the benefits derived from contemplation. Says the same author, "The intelligence benefits. Doubtless it has fewer ideas, but they are deeper. A single idea may well be the summing up of many others in one luminous whole. It is in this way that the scholar makes progress in knowledge through the simplicity of his general ideas."

Also the will, that faculty which more than any other has the power to cast the soul down to hell, or, under God, to lift it up to heaven, "is strengthened in the exercise of the virtues, above all through love." Summing up, he says, "The more we love, the better we understand the demands made upon us by the love of God. All our faculties have attained their ideal. Then only do we reach that spring of living water,

which in Holy Scriptures is the symbol of an intense spiritual life ”<sup>1</sup>

The question then arises, To what extent, and by what method, dare a soul living in the world and immersed in many activities, seek the prayer of contemplation? If contemplation is a work of love, the answer may then be found in St Bernard's direction as to the measure and mode of loving God—to love Him without mode and without measure, launching oneself on the gale of the Spirit, letting it blow him whither and as far as He wills

There is a fine passage from Dom Butler which seems to cover the whole matter “There are four elements in religion,” he says; “the institutional or external element of the Church, Sacraments and public worship; the intellectual element of doctrine, dogma and theology, the mystical element of will and emotion and personal religious experience; and the element of service of others A fully developed, properly balanced, personal religious life must be the result of an harmonious blending of these four elements, not one of which may be neglected except at the cost of a one-sided, distorted, enfeebled type of religion In regard to the mystical element itself, it is not to be cultivated as a thing apart from the every-day duties of life, our life may not be divided into water-tight compartments, it is only by means of self-discipline in the spiritual formation of our own characters, and of the discipline of life in our relations with our fellow-men, it is only by bearing ourselves bravely and overcoming in our appointed station in the great battle of life—it is only thus that those most intimate personal relations of our souls with God, which are the mystical element

<sup>1</sup> Farges, *Mystical Phenomena*, p 41

of religion, will attain to their highest, and noblest, and most fruitful consummation ”

At the risk of repetition we might well add here what the same writer goes on to say as to the kind of souls that are called to this mystical consummation “ Nor are these things,” he continues, “ the preserve of the intellectual and the educated, or of any spiritually leisured class, they are open to all—to the poor and the unlettered, and the lowly workers, who spend their lives in alternation between the conscientious performance of their daily round of humble duties and the regular recourse to God in affective prayer and rudimentary contemplation ” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Butler, *Western Mysticism*, pp 324-25

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PREPARATION FOR CONTEMPLATION

THERE are for every human work two kinds of preparation. We might call them the general and the particular. In writing about spiritual matters, theologians refer to them as the remote preparation and the proximate, but we shall use the simpler terms. The significance of this twofold preparation might be illustrated by the reply of a brilliant scholar who was asked how long it took him to prepare a certain lecture. "About twenty years and two hours," he answered. The years were devoted to his general preparation, it included his school and University courses, the general training and storing of his mind. With this general preparation as a background, he was able by a particular preparation of a few hours to do readily the piece of work immediately in hand.

The same principle holds in our spiritual labours. For any work of prayer there must be the general or remote preparation and the particular. The main purpose of this preparation is to remove everything that might act as an obstacle to the work of the Holy Spirit, everything that would prevent us from following His leading promptly, easily and sweetly, and to develop such interior habits as will enable us to respond fully and swiftly to all His calls.

We shall consider the preparation that leads to contemplation under several heads, as follows. 1. The

absence of mortal sin; 2 The absence of attachment to venial sin, 3 A hatred of all spiritual imperfection, 4 The habit of concentration of the attention; 5. Diligent use of the Sacraments

1 In the first place, there must be, as a matter of course, no mortal sin on the soul. A mortal sin is defined as a violation of the known will of God under circumstances where the act shows three characteristics. First, the matter in itself must be serious; second, there must be adequate knowledge of its nature, and third, it must be committed with purpose and deliberation. One who under these conditions violates the will of God cuts himself off deliberately from all grace. Ordinary sanctifying grace is necessary before one can take any forward step in the exercise of the spiritual life, and there can no grace dwell where mortal sin reigns. It is enough to state this requirement without going on to discuss it. Its truth must be clear to all.

2 In the second place, the contemplative soul must be free from the love of any venial sin. It is hardly conceivable that a soul which genuinely desires to contemplate God in love could permit itself to be in a state of offence against Him in a serious issue, knowing it to be serious, and persisting in it deliberately. The soul which is really in earnest, loving God and desiring to love Him always more and more, and trying ever to express that love in service, such a soul with the Christ-ideal ever before it, and constantly fortified by the grace of the Sacraments, should not find it difficult to avoid mortal sin, but venial sin is another matter. Not even the highest saint would dare to say that venial sin did not from time to time enter his life. Much venial sin which mars the lives of even the best of men

has to do with human infirmity rather than with malice. A temptation to sin arises, the matter in itself is not a serious one, or, there is a want of knowledge concerning its true nature, or, again, acting on an impulse of emotion, and without stopping to deliberate, we are surprised into yielding to the evil thing. Thus does venial sin find place in the lives even of saints. In every case its effects are wholly bad, for even though not motivated by deliberate evil intent, every sin of whatever kind is the injection into the soul of a virus of moral and spiritual poison. But venial sin does not cut the soul off from God or from grace, and while it impedes, it does not prevent progress. It is not incompatible with living the life of spiritual perfection.

Although venial sin does not cut the soul off from God, he who is not steadfastly desirous of, and labouring for, the extirpation of such habits, using all possible means whereby to eliminate them, cannot aspire to the higher things of the spirit. As long as he is complacent regarding such habits, his soul is so weighted down that the loftier flights are impossible to it, and to seek them under such conditions would be little short of the sin of presumption.

Much more serious still would it be if we allowed ourselves to entertain a love for any such venial sin, for the deliberate love of sin of any kind is in itself a state of sin, even though the sin so loved be not actually committed.<sup>1</sup> We should pray earnestly for the realization that even the slightest sin deliberately committed is a rejection of our Lord. In His goodness and compassion for our infirmity He may not cut us off from Himself because of it, but none the less is it a wound to His loving heart. To love a venial sin and continue

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 205



in it is to trade on His love "He is good and kind, I know that this will wound and hurt Him, but I will take the chances on His not holding it against me" The soul which meets even the least of sins in this spirit is loving the thing which is evil, and such a one cannot lay hold upon any of the high favours of the kingdom of God, for to love what is evil is an evil itself

3 The third condition under which to seek the contemplative spirit of prayer is that of an unwillingness to tolerate spiritual imperfection It is well at this point to discriminate between sin and imperfection Sin of any kind is a positive violation of the divine will in a matter which is of obligation Imperfection is a negative term, meaning that which is not perfect. It implies that which may be good, but not completely good, and this could never be said of any form of sin It implies also that we have the power through grace to make the action better The imperfect act is morally good, although it lacks the degree of perfection proper to spiritual progress We must not call a thing bad which is only less good, although the danger of choosing the lesser good is seen when we reflect that just as venial sin leads to mortal sin, imperfections deliberately and habitually indulged are apt to lead to venial sin But every act performed through indwelling grace is intrinsically good and meritorious, even though it be less good than might have been the case had we yielded ourselves more completely to the leading of grace St Paul says, "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly,"<sup>1</sup> but he will reap something and will have his sheaves to lay at the Lord's feet at the end<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor ix. 6

<sup>2</sup> An article in *La Vie Spirituelle*, September 1923, by Père Garrigou-Lagrange, O P, throws much light on the distinction between venial sin and imperfections

Imperfection, therefore, is to be defined as a failure fully to co-operate with grace in a matter in which God leaves the soul free to follow its own will and judgment. There are cases where the divine intelligence and judgment reveal to us a certain thing as good, but which the divine will does not require of us under penalty of any kind of blame. Imperfections have to do with what, in a general way, might be called counsels, not with precepts. Failure to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit is not, in every instance, sin, however perilous it may be to elect to serve God in a different way from that which He reveals as His wish, and therefore as the more perfect way for us. Not to follow the leading in such case may forfeit us the grace of a special advance, but it does not cause us to forfeit, nor does it even in itself diminish, the grace we already have. But those who aspire to the higher service of God cannot afford to permit any deliberate act which would involve a less perfect course than that which might have been pursued.

4 Concentration is necessary for any good mental work, and habits of concentration operate in the same way, whatever the attention be set upon. People forget this in their complaints about distracted prayers. We can bring to our prayers only the kind of mind we have. If my mind has been trained to concentrate, I shall be able to pray in a concentrated manner. If I have allowed my mind to grow habitually dissipated, never compelling it to hold long to any one idea, it will, of course, behave in the same dissipated manner when I pray as it does at other times. We have already seen that concentration is to be learned by the action of the will forcing the attention to remain fixed upon the subject chosen for our consideration. The child who is

seeking to master a lesson and whose attention is drawn away by every passing sight or sound is told, "Fix your attention on your book, and stop looking out of the window" The child, by an act of its will, withdraws its attention from the distracting thing and centres it on its work, and does this whenever the distraction intrudes itself The result is that after a time he acquires sound habits of attention, the distracting thing no longer makes any impression on his consciousness, and he develops into a good student who learns swiftly and easily because his whole mind is steadfastly set upon his task Bring such a mind to prayer, and the work of prayer will be well and worthily done

The general preparation for contemplation involves, however, not only these positive and habitual acts of concentration, but also the avoidance of practices which would produce habits of distraction or dissipation of mind In order to become a man of prayer, it is imperative that as a definite rule in life one avoid light and frivolous occupations, which inevitably engage the mind in a manner which will lead to continual distraction This does not mean that on occasion one might not for purposes of mental recreation indulge in passing amusements, or in a certain amount of light reading, the bow needs occasionally, perhaps regularly, to be unbent, but resolute care must be taken to see that such things are a relaxation only, and that they do not degenerate into an interest in life Security in this respect can be assured if one will offer the relaxation to God just as he might offer a work which he does for His glory Our *not doing* is to be for God's glory as much as our *doing*. But the universal experience is that as one grows in the spirit of prayer less and less

does he desire to engage the mind in such lighter exercises. He loses his taste for them, they no longer serve as a relaxation, but rather as an undesirable, or even painful, intrusion. This is again one of those natural principles which are found in all relations of life. The student of whom we were thinking a few moments ago as time goes on is more and more impatient of those things which withdraw him from the studies which he has grown to love. Indeed, this is the real natural test of the depth of our interest in whatever we are undertaking, whether it be the work of mastering one of the natural sciences or the science of prayer.

Amongst other distracting habits which we are to avoid if we would acquire real concentration is the indulgence in frequent or long conversations of a light and aimless nature. This not only contributes to the habit of distraction, but is rarely free from fault. As à Kempis says, "It is easier not to speak at all than not to speak amiss." One could not do better in regard to these dangers than to take the tenth and twentieth chapters of the first book of *The Imitation of Christ* as a guide both for principle and for practice. Also the habit of day-dreaming, holding within ourselves imaginary conversations, dramatizing imaginary situations of which we are always the central figure and the hero, must be recognized as utterly incompatible with, and destructive of, the spirit of prayer.

Finally, he who would tread the higher ways, whether in things earthly or things heavenly for that matter, must learn to limit strictly his interests. One cannot concentrate on too great a variety of separate interests. To be interested in too many things is a barrier to proficiency in any one thing. This is a

principle which governs men in all relations of life. How much more should it govern us in things that are eternal! But along with the limiting-there must be a deepening. What we lose in extensiveness we must gain in intensity. There must be a corresponding strengthening of our hold upon those things to which we really desire to devote our time and our powers. The time which we refuse to give to frivolous and unprofitable employment must not be frittered away. It must be actually employed in the things of God. Thus will we be able to possess a mind governed by a great power of concentration, which will by the force and weight of its drive be able to thrust aside the common distractions which so easily beset weaker spirits.

5 Some of these means which are to be employed in order to prepare the soul for the higher walks of prayer are seen to be negative, while others are positive. The final one we are to consider is pre-eminently positive in its character. While certain Sacraments, like baptism and penance, have their negative aspect, undoing and eliminating certain evil works and qualities in the soul, yet it must be kept in mind that the Christian life is primarily positive, not negative. Every Sacrament has its positive aspect which is its chief aspect. Baptism and penance take away sin, but this alone would be of little advantage. If sin were removed and the soul then left to its own devices, quickly would it again be in the toils of spiritual death. But baptism makes us one with God, infusing His life into us, and making it our life. Penance takes away guilt indeed, but it also infuses into the soul a special and powerful grace which enables it to continue its warfare with the certain hope of victory, with the

spiritual equipment which all the powers of evil cannot overcome if we use it as we ought, and as we can

The mere putting away of evil will accomplish nothing To "abhor that which is evil" will not be effective for the soul's health unless we go on to observe the other half of the apostle's injunction, and also "cleave to that which is good" We are not only to "put off the old man," but we are to "put on the new" In order to do this, one has to be diligent in the worthy reception of the Sacraments, especially that of the Lord's Body and Blood in Holy Communion Our life of prayer, as indeed all our spiritual life, must be lived in God, through God, and according to God This is not possible to one who is not continually receiving new infloodings of grace through Holy Communion, for in this Sacrament we receive Christ Himself, God and Man, all that He is and all that He has, so far as our spiritual capacity permits The faithful and frequent communicant continually receives God within himself in the manner ordained of God Incarnate God enthrones Himself in the heart of such a one, and uses that person's human faculties for His own purposes. We pray well only because it is Christ, the Incarnate Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who prays within us; and if He is thus reigning in our hearts He can and will lift us up along with His Sacred Humanity with which we are made one, to the loftiest modes of communion with the Ever-Blessed Trinity In short, He will make us to be proficient in the life of contemplation

## CHAPTER X

### MORTIFICATION AND PRAYER

AN element of the highest importance in preparation for prayer of any kind is found in the work of mortification of self-will, and when we say that such mortification is an essential of the Christian life, we are using the word in its strictest sense. We do not have to go farther than the New Testament and our Lord's own teaching to find our warrant for this statement. His words are sufficient. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself,"<sup>1</sup> "Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple"<sup>2</sup> He makes no exceptions or qualifications of any kind.

Again, according to His explicit teaching, mortification is placed on an equal footing with prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount prayer and fasting, along with almsgiving, are bracketed together as being of the same obligation and necessity. He who prays, however earnestly, without mortifying his appetites and desires, is no better than the man who may practise some sort of self-denial, who may give money to relieve the poor, but who never utters a prayer to God. There is a universal acceptance of the principle of the duty of prayer amongst all men who believe in any sense in a personal God, but many of these neglect, or even formally reject, the practice of mortification. Such souls are like one who would seek to use a key where no

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt xvi 24.

<sup>2</sup> St. Luke xiv 27

lock existed, or sought security behind a lock to which there was no key. Prayer and mortification are the mutually sustaining counterparts of each other.

This was not only our Lord's teaching, but it was His own practice. In everything He denied Himself, subordinating His human will in all things to His Father. "I do nothing of Myself," He says<sup>1</sup>. He is reported again and again to have declared that He came not to do His own will. This was the principle of mortification which governed the life of the Perfect Man, of whom the apostle testified that "He pleased not Himself."

It is clear from our Lord's teaching and from His life as He lived it amongst men that the self-denial which is so essential is a mortification, a putting to death, for this is what the word means, of our own wills and desires. The Christian life consists in the continual choosing of the will of God instead of our own wills, and he who does his own will and clings to it cannot be doing the will of God, and therefore cannot be living in any true sense the Christian life. Christian achievement and mortification will be found always to balance each other. The measure in which we do violence to self-will, coupled with the faithful living of the sacramental life, is the measure in which we advance in the life of Christ. All the great spiritual masters give us this as their principle. Father Baker tells us that "according to the established course of divine providence, perfection in prayer is accompanied with a proportionate perfection in mortification"<sup>2</sup>. Such also is the consistent teaching of Thomas à Kempis in the *Imitation*. "The more a man dies to himself, the

<sup>1</sup> St. John viii. 28

<sup>2</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 206



more he begins to live to God " <sup>1</sup> " Son, leave thyself, and thou shalt find Me " <sup>2</sup> " Forsake all, and thou shalt find all " <sup>3</sup> If the operation of this principle is essential to the ordinary life of grace which all must live, how much more imperative is it that it be the ruling power in the lives of those who would aspire to greater things in the life of prayer and perfection

It would seem, therefore, that self-will, so universal in the heart of the natural man, is the one thing which neutralizes the power of the Spirit If God is to come in and direct and rule the heart, self-will must be cast out. It is totally incompatible with the love and service of God If allowed free rein it takes possession of us, and we cannot, at the same time, be possessed of God and ruled by self St Augustine puts it well and clearly when he says that there are, in the last analysis, but two loves, the love of self extending ultimately to the contempt of God, and the love of God extending to the contempt of self—*amor Dei, ad contemptum sui* <sup>4</sup> No treaty of peace can ever be effected between these two loves. Self-denial, which is the mortification of self-love, is the only method known either in revelation or experience, the use of which will enthrone the divine love, and enable the soul to fulfil its destiny

Mortification does not mean self-denial of a vague and general character. It means definite self-denial in those particular things to which we are inclined to cling, in short, the denying of ourselves where it will cost us something If we are unwilling to deny ourselves in this way, then we are loving self and the things of self more than we love God and the things of God

<sup>1</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk II, ch xii

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Bk III 37 <sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Bk III 32

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine, *de Civitate Dei*, xiv 28

Mortification brings the body into subjection to the spirit, and the spirit into subjection to God. It accomplishes this by continually crossing the desires and motions of the human spirit, which crossing (if the intention be for the glory of God) will be not only the thrusting out of the human spirit, but, by the same action, the bringing in of the divine Spirit. This process may be slow and gradual, but if persisted in, it will surely destroy self-love and self-will, and enable the divine love and the divine will to enter in and take possession of our entire self, and herein lies our perfection and our happiness.

In the life of mortification, love must be the motive force of every act. Where love is, mortification brings joy. We see this on every hand in the natural sphere. The student, the explorer, the merchant, all sacrifice many things for the love of the object of their quest. They deny themselves advantages and pleasures which, so far as the nature of them is concerned, are good and desirable in themselves. We find the same thing in the sphere of earthly love and friendship. How many sacrifices are made by friend for friend, by brother for brother, by parent for child, with love as the motive. The sacrifice may be very real, it may involve great suffering, yet love makes it a happy thing, and the suffering itself becomes an instrument of joy.

Mortification, in the spiritual sphere, falls into two classes. It is either unavoidable or voluntary. Unavoidable mortification in its turn falls into several divisions. It may come through certain trials, such as poverty, sickness, persecution, loss of friends, or through temptation or spiritual desolation. These are the more advantageous, for they come not through any devising of our own, but are sent either by the direct

will of God, or through His wise permission, for our good. They are not so likely to arouse us to spiritual pride as are mortifications which are self-chosen. Other necessary mortifications arise from required obedience to law, subjection to superiors, bearing with those with whom we have to live, or through obligations which arise in the forum of conscience.<sup>1</sup>

Our Lord in His teaching evidently had in mind these necessary mortifications. He clearly implies that the cross will be found daily in every man's life. Not infrequently we can avoid it, but it will be only to find another cross. We may fight against it, repine and rebel, but the pain, the stress will be there. If we would be His disciples, we are to take up this daily cross willingly, gladly, and follow Him.

Voluntary mortifications are those which are self-imposed, without any spur of obligation or necessity. We take them upon ourselves because we believe that they will advance us in the way of Christian perfection.

<sup>1</sup> "My instructions to Dame Gertrude on the subject of mortification may be embraced under three heads. First, that she should do all that belonged to her to do by any law, human or divine. In this was comprised obedience to divine inspirations not only in matters of obligation, but also in things that were indifferent; for divine inspirations are to be observed by spiritual persons as a law of prime importance. Secondly, that she was to refrain from those things that were forbidden her by human or divine law, or by divine inspirations. Thirdly, that she should bear with as much patience and resignation as possible all crosses and contradictions to her natural will, which were inflicted by the hand of God. Such, for example, were aridities, temptations, afflictions or bodily pains, sickness and infirmity, or, again, loss of honour and esteem, unkindness, neglect, or, again, the loss of friends, or want of necessities or comforts. All this was to be endured patiently, whether the crosses came directly from God or by means of His creatures. These, indeed, were mortifications enough for Dame Gertrude, or for any other soul, and there was no need for anyone to advise or impose others."—Augustine Baker, *Inner Life of Dame Gertrude More*, pp. 76-77.

Ordinarily, however, self-imposed mortifications are to be suspected. Rarely should they be practised without the approbation of some spiritual director, and such approbation should not be sought or given except where a soul has been faithful in meeting with courage and humility the mortifications which belong to its state of life, the crosses which lie daily in its path. One who was impatient under the burden of loss or sickness would be guilty of presumption were he, while in such a state of rebellion, to inflict upon himself mortifications which were of his own devising.

These warnings are not to be taken, however, as forbidding all voluntary mortifications, even though the soul has not been quite perfect in the practice of mortifications which are unavoidable. Few, if any, ever attain in this life to such perfection. It will suffice if the will, and the intention of the heart, be truly set upon God, and if the soul is resolutely and humbly seeking through divine grace to be faithful in the ordinary life of self-denial. Indeed, if one is to be faithful in these ordinary mortifications at all, it is necessary that he drill himself in certain voluntary courses of self-denial. These acts are always safer, less likely to stimulate pride and vanity, if they have regard to *not doing* rather than to *doing*. For example, refrain from talking, discipline yourself to sit quietly, listening to what is being said without thrusting your opinion upon others, or, at least, waiting until several others have expressed themselves before you venture your judgment. Practise to see how far you can acquire the habit of never speaking of self except when it is really necessary, and never of your neighbour unless you can say something kind. Forbid yourself to gossip. With strong resolution refrain from

meddling either by word or act with what does not concern you Do not embroil your mind with interests which have their root in a curious running after news which is of no value, for by doing this you are definitely cultivating a habit of distraction—a desperate business indeed for one who is seeking the higher ways of prayer Learn, as a general rule of life, to practise silence Seek solitude more frequently, refrain from idle visits, cut off light and frivolous reading Above all, complain of nothing “*Sine querula*, without complaint,” is the characteristic which the *Imitation* assigns to the life lived in Christ

To most of us the courses of mortification included in these suggestions will prove truly a tremendous task If we can by persistent and earnest effort make some little progress in them, and combine with them a faithful pursuance of interior devotion, we shall most surely become mortified, ascetic souls, disciplined in the ways of prayer, and speedily will our hearts be freed for the higher work of contemplation There will be no need to seek after difficult and unusual modes of self-denial If self-will be really put to death, it matters not by what weapon the death stroke is given Faithfulness in these ordinary things will mortify and kill all vices in us, for such a course will constitute the continual sacrifice of self-will, which is the only effective foe of the divine will, and its mortification will put us in the way of going on to ever higher things in the service of God

This lesson learned, we shall begin to understand that there is no need to devote ourselves to severe fasts, scourgings, or other macerations of the flesh which the ignorant, popular mind is so apt to think of when mortification is mentioned Curb and discipline the

power of self-will, and the work will be well under way. But it will never be done with in this life. Whatever progress we make, none the less has the warfare to be continued as long as life shall last. It is the universal judgment of the masters of the spiritual life that there is no state of sanctity here on earth, however exalted, in which one is safe in ceasing the constant warfare against self-will.

When our Lord spoke of denying oneself, He meant saying No to oneself, and this has to be practised not only in respect to that which is bad, but also in respect to many good things. He who habitually does a thing for no other reason than that he wants to do it, and regards this as a good and sufficient motive, even though the thing be good in itself, is bound fast to a lower life, and cannot soar to the heights. He who recognizes self-will for what it is, namely, the sole cause and instrument of sin, will labour daily to mortify self in good things as well as in things which are evil.

In order to achieve this, we may discreetly, and under proper guidance, devote ourselves daily to doing or not doing, as the case may be, for no other purpose than to train and educate the will so that it will understand that it cannot arrogate to itself the independent control of our life, but must act subject to the divine grace within. Remember, however, that the will is not to be crushed, it is to be disciplined, for as it is only through the exercise of self-will that sin arises, so it is only through the exercise of the will, consecrated to God, that we can do anything for Him. He who does not practise this continual disciplining of the will cannot expect to tread the ways of a close and intimate communion with God, and nowhere in the whole regimen of the spiritual life is this more necessary than

in the work of contemplative prayer, and right habits of will, as with all other habits, can be acquired only by persistent drill. A modern psychologist, speaking from the natural point of view only, and in respect to the demands which are made upon us in the course of the so-called secular life, says, "Keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day. That is, be systematically ascetic or heroic in little unnecessary points, do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it, so that when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test. The man who has daily inured himself to habits of concentrated attention, energetic volition, and self-denial in unnecessary things, will stand like a tower when everything rocks around him, and when his softer fellow-mortals are winnowed like chaff in the blast" <sup>1</sup>

Such is the mortified, the ascetic, life as commended by a great master with the aim of securing power and success in merely human and mundane affairs. Where the same ascetic course is pursued resolutely and definitely for the glory of God and for the building up of the soul in Him, spiritual power and achievement on the highest plane are assured, and such asceticism is a necessity as a means and instrument, the employment of which leads inevitably to the exercise of the mystical life in contemplation.

"What is the reason," asks the author of the *Imitation*, "why some of the saints are so perfect and contemplative? Because they made it their study wholly to mortify in themselves all earthly desires, and thus they were enabled with the whole interior of their heart to

<sup>1</sup> William James, *Psychology* (Briefer Course), p. 149

cleave to God”<sup>1</sup> So, the mortification of earthly desires and the power of cleaving unto God are complementary one to the other St Jane de Chantal says, “Mortification without prayer is very difficult, prayer without mortification is very dangerous” And again, this holy guide of souls declares that “all good prayer is produced and preserved by mortification”<sup>2</sup>

We shall fail utterly, however, to grasp the true nature and meaning of mortification unless it is made very clear to us that it does not consist merely in slaying something within us That would be a poor and bootless achievement It is not the crushing of an evil will, but the taking of such a will and by divine grace purifying it, reforming and transforming it, so that where its power had been used for self, and therefore for evil, it will henceforth be devoted to directing all the capacities of the inner man to the work and glory of God Mortification does not bind, it liberates It frees us from the fetters of unnecessary, even if not evil, things The more I desire and require, the more things and conditions there are, the want of which makes me restless or unhappy, the more am I enslaved, bound upon “the wheel of things” This work is therefore not negative, it is positive It is the exchanging of a dead weight which bears us down to earth for that which is instinct with eternal life, bearing us up to a higher plane According to St Augustine it is not a quenching or a reining in of love, but a freeing of love for unfettered flights, a transfer of our love from earthly to divine things, a withdrawing

<sup>1</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation*, Bk I, ch xi

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Mystical Prayer according to St Jane Francis de Chantal*, by Saudreau, p 27



of our desire from the one and a setting of it upon the other <sup>1</sup>

It is therefore a blessed exchange, not a dead sacrifice "We give up the old man in exchange for the new We leave the human spirit to find the divine We mortify the natural man to give life to the spiritual man We weaken nature to strengthen grace We renounce cupidity to gain charity We deny self-love to enjoy divine love We lose our own will to find the will of God Happy exchange<sup>1</sup> that frees us from all our evil and brings us all our good " <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Bk XIV, ch xvii

<sup>2</sup> Buckler, *The Perfection of Man by Charity*, p 267

## CHAPTER XI

### OF THE SOUL'S READINESS FOR CONTEMPLATION

IT is dangerous in the spiritual life to demand a sign. Our Lord condemned it. It smacks of a lack of faith. And yet the apostle tells us that we are to try the spirits whether they be of God, and there is such a thing as waiting humbly until God has given some sign of His will. There is a difference between demanding the sign which we appoint for God to show, and a humble desire to have some definite indication of His will. What, then, are the indications by which we can know that God means us to go on to some purer form of prayer? Such signs there are, and the masters are quite clear in the main in teaching what they are and how they are to be interpreted.

First, having been faithful in ordinary discursive meditation, the soul finds itself no longer interested in such an exercise. It becomes unsatisfactory, difficult, or even impossible, to meditate longer. The mind does not seem to take hold in the ordinary discursive way when divine subjects are presented. One must not, however, cease meditation on the first apparent indication of this condition. The seeming inability to meditate might be a deception of the devil, or it might easily be the result of sloth, or a temptation to sloth. One should continue the effort to meditate for some time after this sign seems to be present. It would indeed be fatal if everyone who felt a passing distaste for medita-

tion should assume immediately that it pointed to a call to higher forms of prayer. In any event, it were wise not to act on one's own judgment, but to seek counsel from some spiritual guide who had knowledge of such things. At this point it would be well to recall St. Teresa's warning against directors who are not good spiritual theologians, however holy and devout their own course of life may be. And directors are to be careful about suggesting more advanced methods of prayer, for, as Father Baker says: "Far less inconveniences would follow by detaining a soul somewhat too long in a humble, inferior exercise, as of meditation, when she is fit and ripe for a more sublime one, than if she should at the first, or before her time, be put into one above her present capacity" <sup>1</sup>

Secondly, the soul which is ready for the more affective or contemplative modes of prayer of the will is almost certain to find within itself a drawing to some new exercise, though it may not as yet know at all to what that attraction tends; and along with this will go the dissatisfaction with the former methods of which we have just spoken. In this case, if, through the want of proper direction, nothing new is suggested to the soul, it will feel itself invited, as it were, merely to wait on God, to repose in Him in loving confidence, assured in its conscience and judgment, that in His own time He will point the way. No restlessness or anxiety invades the soul. Sweetly and calmly it tarries the Lord's leisure. He will refresh it, when and how He wills, and in the meantime it may be sure that while it may seem to be waiting with nothing happening, all the while God "is now secretly and quietly infusing wisdom into the soul, together with the loving know-

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 427.

ledge of Himself, without many divers distinct or separated acts " <sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, the condition of the soul and its fitness for a higher mode of prayer must be tested by the dominance of a sense of hesitation to rush too impetuously into new forms of devotion. This hesitation has its root not in spiritual cowardice, but in a humble sense of unworthiness, and is accompanied by a willingness to be guided, and a corresponding shrinking from any effort at self-guidance. It may last for some time, for the signs that there is due some change in the method of our prayer do not normally come suddenly and without warning. Indeed, all the signs we are considering may appear so gradually as for a time to be scarcely perceptible.

The fourth sign which must be looked for is the willingness of the soul not only to wait on God, as we thought in considering the second of the signs enumerated, but to wait with a desire for solitude and silence. As we have seen, the soul thus called by God has no desire to make haste; indeed, it has no desire for any change or advancement whatever, if it be not morally sure that it is the will of God. The words solitude and silence are important, and they present one of the prime tests. The soul which is unable to find satisfaction and peace in silence is wholly unfit for contemplation. A talkative contemplative is a violent contradiction in terms. "Be still and know that I am God," is a necessary motto for him who would commune with God. "To contemplate is to receive, and it is impossible to receive the highest wisdom, which is contemplation, other than in a silent spirit" <sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, he who does not love at least occasional

<sup>1</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, p. 77

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, III. 40

solitude, but ever desires the crowd, has no capacity for prayer "Solitude," says St John Damascene, "is the mother of prayer, and prayer is the revelation of the divine glory" <sup>1</sup> And since prayer is communication and correspondence with another, it follows that solitude does not mean being all alone; it means being alone with God, rejoicing in this divine and sweetest companionship This desire for solitude with the Beloved is not an extraordinary thing It is a desire natural to the heart of man, and here, as in so many other instances, the natural law operates in the spiritual sphere St John of the Cross with his practical insight into human nature calls attention to the fact that "a strange characteristic of those that are in love is this, that they are far more desirous of enjoying each other's society when they are alone together and withdrawn from every creature than in doing so in the company of any For, although they be together, yet if there be any strange company present with them, even though they would not converse and speak together if they were away from them any more than they do in their presence, and though those others speak not, neither converse at all, their very presence is sufficient for the lovers not to have pleasure and enjoyment in each other The reason for this is that since love is the union of two only, these two desire to commune alone" <sup>2</sup> He who is in love with God desires to be alone with God. The same St John speaks of God "anointing the soul with the unction of loving knowledge, most delicate, serene, peaceful, lonely, strange to sense and imagination

<sup>1</sup> St John Damascene, *De Transfig* 10 Quoted by Saudreau, *The Life of Union*, No 76

<sup>2</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, p 378

He suspends its power of meditation because He reserves it for this lonely unction, inclining it to solitude and quiet" <sup>1</sup>

In the period of transition when one is seeking to read the signs which may appear, the soul is often dark and troubled. It finds no satisfaction in mere intellectual exercises of meditation, and often as little satisfaction in the effort at contemplation. This, again, is a normal phase of the life of prayer, and the rule holds in all life. If one gives up one occupation for another, he finds that it requires some little time in which to adjust himself to the new method of work and to the unaccustomed conditions. He has put off the old harness to which he was accustomed and has not yet had time to adjust himself to the new. It wears and rubs. But a period of patience will accustom us to the new conditions, and we will find the work better done, and the approach to God easier and surer than it was when the former inferior method was in use. During the time of readjustment we have to exercise patience, and in the end patience will have her perfect work. This period of difficulty and obscurity is what St John of the Cross regards as the first entrance into the dark night of the soul <sup>2</sup>

But while one must hold fast and not yield too easily to the temptation to return to the old ways, yet it were a mistake, as we have already seen, to think that having once begun the work of contemplation we are never to return to meditation. It often continues to be a help to those who are prosecuting regularly the exercises of contemplative prayer. As the work of contemplation in general has its inception in medita-

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, pp 81-82

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, *Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk I ch i 1

tion, so it may easily be that particular occasions of contemplation may have their beginnings in a brief period of meditation, or even of reading. St John of the Cross says that the soul "will frequently need to make use of meditation quietly and in moderation,"<sup>1</sup> and Pourrat, commenting on this master, adds that "discursive meditation is the way to prepare for active contemplation, it purifies the powers of the soul, and, therefore, it is not a good thing to leave it altogether until contemplation has become habitual."<sup>2</sup> Both of these writers are here recommending this recurrence to occasional meditation to those who are just entering upon the higher way, but St Teresa does not confine it to novices in the art of contemplation, but narrates that during no less than eighteen of the most crucial years of her life she found it almost impossible to recollect herself in God without beginning with the help of reading and meditation. "Reading is of great service," she says, "towards procuring recollection in anyone who proceeds in this way. . . During all this time it was only after Communion that I ever ventured to begin my prayer without a book."<sup>3</sup>

The humble willingness to descend from the heights of contemplation to the lower levels of reading and meditation, whenever they would seem to be a help, is, therefore, to be regarded as one of the signs that the soul is ready to dwell on the heights, for only he who is humble deserves to be exalted.

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mt Carmel*, Bk II, xv 2

<sup>2</sup> Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, III 197-98

<sup>3</sup> St Teresa, *Life*, IV 12, 13

## CHAPTER XII

### OF THE SOUL'S DESIRE FOR GOD

WE have been considering certain signs which may indicate that a soul is ready to leave the paths of discursive meditation and to seek contemplation. But all these must be verified by one other consideration, which has been suggested already, but needs to be emphasized and explicated. Is there a strong and persisting, though humble, desire in the will to think upon and to approach God directly, rather than to dwell upon some object which has to do indirectly with Him and His revelation of Himself? This involves a tendency to rest lovingly in the divine presence with acts and aspirations of love rather than to occupy the mind with the consideration and study of those things which He has revealed concerning Himself. In short, there should be an interest, profound and compelling, in knowing God rather than in knowing the things which pertain to God. There must be a desire to know God, and a dissatisfaction in knowing merely about Him. The soul under these conditions does not want to study or think; it wants to love.

This spirit finds illustration in the sequence of the Advent Collects. In the first we pray that we may have grace to cast off the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, that in the end we may be brought to the glory of the resurrection. Certain means are required to accomplish this, and these means God



has supplied So, in the second Advent Collect we consider in our prayer the Holy Scriptures, the written word of God in which He reveals Himself and His purposes for man Likewise, on the third Sunday the Church directs our attention to another necessary channel of grace which is of divine ordaining, namely, the ministry of the Church whereby we are given the sacramental grace and power which must be possessed and used But as we draw nearer to the unveiling of the Eternal Word before the eyes of men, the soul seems suddenly to be overwhelmed with a holy impatience of mere means and instruments, and breaks out in a cry to God that He come quickly, not under veils and through media, however rich and precious, but in His own immediate power helping and delivering us The Collect is a cry of the heart, no longer for any media that may bring us to God, but for God Himself "Raise up, we pray Thee, Thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, Thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us"

Desire engenders effort, and the more earnest the desire for God, the more will the effort to reach out after Him be marked with patience and persistence We must remind ourselves here that by desire we do not mean a mere impotent wishing, but an energizing desire which induces action Nor do we mean an emotional desire, but a desire which has its field of action in the will I may desire the best things life affords, and yet the cost of these things may be the suffering of that against which all my emotional nature rebels A man may desire a serious operation because

he knows that it is the one condition of life and health, but this does not mean that he has an emotional longing for the peril and pain involved in placing himself in the hands of the surgeon. He may anticipate these with shrinking and horror, but he wills and desires to endure them because of the ultimate result which the operation will achieve. His desire is no less sincere because of this shrinking from the painful experience which is incidental to the surgeon's work. Nor is a soul insincere, as some have thought, who regards with utter distaste the labour and stress of prayer, and shrinks from it keenly, provided the will is resolutely set for the accomplishment of what God may appoint for him in the service of prayer; for sincerity has nothing to do with the emotions, but resides in the will and intention alone.

A genuine and persevering desire for God will operate, therefore, to accomplish all that is required. There is never a moment when we are not consciously or subconsciously desiring something. Desire is one of the essential motive forces which make possible the orderly sequence of life, and all human achievement, whether good or evil, is the result of desire. I go from one thing to another because I am impelled by desire for the next thing. If we could divert the current of this desire into Godward channels, the soul would be in continual prayer, for, as St Augustine assures us, "When we cherish uninterrupted desire for God, along with the exercise of faith, hope and charity, we pray always",<sup>1</sup> and he again tells us that good or evil loves—and we desire that which we love—make good or evil lives.<sup>2</sup> The man who cultivates a perma-

<sup>1</sup> St Augustine, *Epis* cxxx. 18

<sup>2</sup> *Idem, Contra Faust* Bk V 11

ment state of desire to succeed in some secular employment does not find it difficult to direct his activities to that end, indeed they, acting on habit, would seem to direct themselves

Following the same principle, continued desire for God, says Father Baker, "will become easy, and, as it were, natural to the soul, and consequently, without any force used on the imagination or understanding, they may be continued without interruption, for they will flow as freely as breath from the lungs"<sup>1</sup> Only by exercising the will in these holy desires can we "pray without ceasing" External duties may draw us from the actual exercises of prayer, but they will not affect the habitual desire for prayer which resides in the soul The virtue of prayer without ceasing will be ours, and, thanks be to God, if the virtue and fervour lie in our will, even though the emotional nature or feeling does not partake of the desire, we are doing all that God asks St Bernard says that the desire for perfection is accounted to us as perfection,<sup>2</sup> and when we consider the essential relation between perfection and prayer, we can rightly paraphrase the saying, and declare that the desire for prayer, such as we have been considering, is accounted to us as prayer, for energizing desire moulds character. •

Just here a wholesome word of warning may be given to those who are beginners in this way of devotion This desire must be accompanied by a deep sense of humility and a consciousness of the truth that we are not worthy to look for anything at the hands of God It is quite possible for desire to be based upon spiritual pride Satan desired to be like God To be

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p 362

<sup>2</sup> St Bernard, *Epis* ccliv

like unto Him is the aim of our whole Christian course, and all that God has ever done in the Incarnation, through His Cross and Passion, and through all His dealings with the souls of men, has been done in order that we may have the capacity and power to become like Him. And yet, Satan's desire was of such a nature that it worked his terrible and irretrievable downfall. What Mgr. Farges says about the dispositions to receive the highest mystical gifts applies equally to the contemplative prayer we are studying, as indeed it does to all the gifts of God. Two things he insists upon, and here he is following St. Teresa. "First, humility, that is to say, full consciousness of our great unworthiness, and a sole desire to see God more glorified within us. The complete abandonment, that is to say, entire submission to the good pleasure of God, who is in no way bound by any promise to grant us the mystical gifts, since they are not the only way to attain to Christian perfection, even though we might prepare ourselves for them by removing every obstacle and by cultivating to the utmost the other gifts of the Holy Ghost" <sup>1</sup>

St. Francis de Sales sums up the humble and safe course in his classical words: "We should ask nothing and refuse nothing, but leave ourselves in the arms of divine Providence without wasting time in any desire except to will what God wills for us" <sup>2</sup>. This means that our desires, deep and strong as they may be, will not be passionate or impetuous, but will be calmed by our steadfast and loving confidence in, and submission to, the divine will. Prepare the way—yes—by avoiding all things that would prove obstacles to the entering in

<sup>1</sup> Farges, *Mystical Phenomena*, p. 644.

<sup>2</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Conferences*, xxxi.

of God in any way He might will, but leave all to Him. But none the less it lies with us, with the sure assistance of the Holy Spirit, to create the necessary habits, and to this end acts are necessary, forced acts, as the child who would acquire the habit of writing forces itself to perform over and over again the tiresome practice of tracing letters and words. But the habit, once formed, takes care of the acts and reproduces them. Some of us have never, perhaps, learned to pray even in an elementary manner. We again and again forget our prayers entirely. We have to invent some plan to recall the duty of prayer, like putting a book in the middle of the floor when we go to bed at night. We wake in the morning, and the first thought is to wonder why the book is there. Then we recall what we had done and why. We promptly kneel and pray. After a few days we no longer need the reminder. The habit is formed and we have only to keep it up by yielding to it promptly and regularly. By some such device can we acquire the habit of continual acts of desire for 'God, which will constitute, according to St. Augustine, the life of perpetual prayer.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CONTEMPLATION AND THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

IN doing His work in the soul the Holy Spirit employs certain gifts and powers by means of which He directs and rules the various human faculties so that the divine purposes may be fulfilled. For the development of the Christian life the presence of the three theological virtues, faith, hope and love, is required. Without these one cannot live the supernatural life, indeed, it is their presence in the soul which constitutes the supernatural life, for without these no one can be, in any manner or degree, in union with God. These powers are infused into the soul in baptism, and all spiritual acts are performed not only in virtue of them, but every such act develops and strengthens these powers. It may make it clearer if we recall that the word *virtue* is only a modification of the Latin word *Virtus*, which means power, strength, whether in the physical, mental or spiritual sphere. In baptism there was bestowed upon us a spiritual virtue or power, which is called faith, by the use of which we are enabled really to believe and trust in God. We are also given by the same sacrament another power called hope, the exercise of which enables us to enjoy the unswerving, and ever-deepening, expectation of the fulfilment of the divine promises, and the virtue and power of love enables us in all the relations of life to be really and practically loving in our manner of thinking, speaking

and acting The exercise of these powers is the basic necessity in all Christian living There can be no Christian living without them Their presence and exercise are necessary to salvation, necessary in order to live the ordinary life in Christ.

But when we come to consider the varied forms of life and service in the kingdom of God, we find super-added to these virtues certain Gifts of the Holy Ghost, which render special assistance to the soul, and make it possible for us to walk steadily in the upward path which He indicates These Gifts have been described as "seven divine qualities inbreathed", "seven radiations of divine light, flowings of spiritual unction, breathings of power, that attract and draw the will to comply with the inspirations of the Holy Ghost," and they "give a higher perfection to the faculties than the grace of the virtues, raising our spirit to higher things, and rendering it prompt, vigorous, and readily responsive to the divine influences" <sup>1</sup> Likewise, St Thomas Aquinas defines the Gifts as habits infused into the soul, perfecting it and enabling it to obey the Holy Spirit with promptitude <sup>2</sup> Such is the office and work of the Gifts of the Spirit of God

It is our part, assisted always by divine grace, to remove all obstacles to the work of the Spirit within us If we do our part, He will be able to bring these Gifts into action, and "they will produce in us a passive and superhuman faith and love which form what is really contemplation" <sup>3</sup> By means of the virtues of faith, hope and love, assisted by divine grace, we guide,

<sup>1</sup> Ullathorne, *Christian Patience*, pp 164-65

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, 1, 2, Q 68, Art 2

<sup>3</sup> See Lamballe, *Mystical Contemplation*, p 56, also St Thomas, *Summa*, 1, 2, Q 68

as it were, ourselves, by the Gifts of the Spirit we are led and guided. In the operation of the Gifts the soul "is not the mover but the thing moved" <sup>1</sup> St Augustine's prayer, "Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt," might well be construed as a prayer for the growth of the power of the Gifts of the Spirit.

Reasoning and considerations do not govern us here. Committing ourselves to Him, we are led by the Spirit of God, and we do not stop to examine the grounds, or to weigh the reasons why He guides us as He does. We are acted upon rather than acting, and it is through the operation of the Gifts that the Spirit here performs His heavenly offices. Once having cast itself upon the Lord, He "lovingly caresses the soul, stirring with such heavenly sweetness its knowledge and love that it seems rather led and sweetly urged by Him than moving by itself; rather breaking forth into acts passively than producing them of its own accord" <sup>2</sup>

The passage we have just quoted might seem a contradiction in terms. How can one "act passively"? The answer to the question becomes clear when we remind ourselves that the word *passive* has in this connection, like so many terms employed in spiritual parlance, another meaning than that which is given it in our ordinary vernacular. Ordinarily it means inactive, inert, doing nothing. This was the sense in which it was used by the quietists. Their passivity was a state of interior idleness, doing nothing in order that in them, as they said, God might do all. But God

<sup>1</sup> St Thomas, *Summa*, 2, 2, Q. 52, Art. 2

<sup>2</sup> Joan a Jesu, *Theol. Myst.*, quoted by Buckler, *The Perfection of Man by Charity*, p. 219



never works in this way. There is no state in the sphere of ordinary prayer, however high, in which the soul must not be continually responding to God, and response is always, consciously or subconsciously, an activity of the will. By passivity, therefore, we mean that state in which we, by strong, persistent activity of the will, maintain ourselves in a wholly receptive attitude, that God may be able to do within us what He wills to do. It is the condition in which He does something for us rather than our doing something for Him. It is the predominance of this quality of passivity which constitutes one of the chief differentiations between mystical prayer and other forms, such as meditation. Mystical prayer is that in which the passive element, this gazing upon God, the simple waiting upon Him, definitely predominates over the exercise of the reason and imagination. The latter may not be wholly absent, where there is a predominance of the passive quality, and where the soul is resolute to persevere in doing all things necessary in order to leave itself wholly in the hands of God, there is a real and progressive element of mystical prayer. The Abbé Saudreau describes complete passivity as being "nothing else than the full expansion, the perfect development of the Gifts of the Spirit,"<sup>1</sup> and St Thomas says, "Man submits to the action of the Holy Spirit, but in such a manner that he himself acts because he is free."<sup>2</sup>

The exercise of the Gifts is, therefore, in a different class from the exercise of the theological virtues. By the help of the Holy Spirit we can will, plan and execute an act of faith, hope or love. Not so with the

<sup>1</sup> Saudreau, *The Mystical State*, p. 163

<sup>2</sup> St Thomas, *Summa*, 1, 2, Q. 68, Art. 3

Gifts In order to exercise them we must place ourselves in the hands of the Spirit that He may deal with us as He will. Not we, but He is the actor in the exercise of the Gifts. But this does not mean a quietistic inertia on our part. It requires all the most active powers of will thus to yield to the Spirit, and to maintain the receptive attitude which is necessary if He is to do His work within us<sup>1</sup>

When we turn our eyes to the sun and keep them wide open in that direction, they are filled with the glory of the light, so, when we raise our minds and hearts towards God, and, so far as in us lies, keep open all the avenues of communication with Him, His light, His joy and His strength fill the whole being, and through His work, thus unhindered in us, He enables us to grow in wisdom and understanding, and to increase in the knowledge and love and joy and peace of God. This work of the Spirit within us, co-operated with by this response on our part, constitutes the exercise and enjoyment of the contemplative life.

The Gifts which especially concur in effecting this end are those of Understanding, Knowledge and Wisdom. Put briefly, Understanding (which is an infused supernatural Gift of God, and not to be confounded with the natural intellectual faculty which goes by the same name) is the Gift through the exercise of

<sup>1</sup> "By the virtues the soul in a state of grace acts supernaturally, it is true, but it acts in a manner conformable to its rational and human condition as likewise by its own movement and initiative. By the Gifts, it is disposed to act *directly* and *solely* under the divine impulsion (while keeping, of course, its liberty, which is manifested by acquiescence to the inspiration from on high, and this in a manner which does not always fit in with its rational, natural way of seeing and considering things. The influence of the Gifts is, then, in a very real sense, superior to that of the virtues"—Abbot Marmion, *Christ, the Life of the Soul*, p. 116

which we are able intuitively to grasp the things of God, and to understand them in a far more elevated manner than could be possible through the exercise of natural reason, however exalted and refined. As with all the teaching work of the Spirit, we are not led through successive processes of reason, but are rather given a strong and luminous grasp upon the right conclusions of truth. It is in this way that the Spirit fulfils our Lord's promise to lead us into all truth—into truth itself, not through the maze of consideration and argument ordinarily employed to arrive at truth in the natural sphere. The Spirit's Gift of Understanding enables us to penetrate so profoundly and supernaturally the Truth which is God, that as a necessary consequence we stand before that Truth spellbound in love, admiration and joy, which state is the state of contemplation. Such understanding transcends all the natural powers of the human mind. It is another thing altogether from mere human understanding, and operates in another sphere. The object of its quest is eternal truth, which is God Himself, who cannot be comprehended by merely natural processes of thought. This Gift is not, as in the case of the natural intellect, concerned with mental speculation, or the work of arriving at conclusions by processes of reason. The manner of the action of this Gift is to contemplate that truth which faith has already laid hold of, and by this contemplation to cause the soul to rejoice in a more profound belief in God, and to love Him more ardently.

As the Gift of Understanding gives a right and intimate appreciation of God, in like manner the Gift of Knowledge operates in relation to the events and conditions of this earthly life. It enables us to see

them in their true proportion and value, and teaches us how to refer them to God, to see them as it were with His eyes, and so to use them in order that God alone may be glorified. The virtues of the active life prepare the soul for the contemplative, and we must know how to use the active life and how to value the things pertaining to it, if it is to flower into purer and higher forms of prayer.

The Gift of Knowledge must act, first of all, in relation to self, for a false idea of self is the primary obstacle to the work of the Spirit within us. We may be able to get along without the world, and even to despise it, but it is not so easy to put self in its proper place. Many ignorantly think that self is to be crushed, annihilated, but, on the contrary, we cannot find ourselves in any right relation to God unless we consecrate self to Him, and employ all its faculties, estimated at their true value, and raised to their highest power, in His service. "Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's," is the apostolic command<sup>1</sup>. It is only by the trained use of the faculties of self that we can serve God at all. Therefore it is of supreme importance that we learn what self is, its value and use, how and when it is to be disciplined, and how and when, thus disciplined, it is to be brought into play. I must know how to use self, and all other creatures, and all events and conditions of life, for His glory, if I am to make them as the rungs of a ladder by which I may climb up to Him. All this is taught through the Gift of Knowledge, it is this Gift which enables us to see and appreciate true values, and the vision of God is denied to him who does not, through the Holy Ghost, continually live and judge all earthly

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor vi 20

things in virtue of this Gift Our Lord said to St. Catherine of Siena, " My daughter, know what I am, and what thou art " The knowing of God through the exercise of the Gift of Understanding, and the knowing of self and all other creatures through the Gift of Knowledge, these equip the soul for the contemplative life, which, as St. Gregory declares, consists in the " vision of the Principle," the vision of Him who is the ultimate and only Reality, the foundation Principle outside of whom nothing can exist.

But behind the Gifts of Understanding and Knowledge stands the Gift of Wisdom, the subtlest of all the Gifts of the Spirit, the one without which the operation of no other Gift can be effective The Gift of Wisdom is a supernatural habit infused into the soul by the Holy Spirit, by which He enables us to know, to love, and to delight in God Such is the comprehensive nature of Wisdom that he who receives it is able to lay hold of and employ to supreme advantage all the diversities of Gifts which the Spirit affords.

Wisdom in the spiritual man is analogous to taste in the natural man The taste of a certain fruit commends itself to me, I do not know why, it simply is so, and this is all I can say about it; and as a consequence I adjudge it to be good *De gustibus non disputandum est* (Concerning tastes there is no disputing) is an old proverb There is nothing upon which one can base a disputation Wisdom is the Gift which enables us to seek after the things of God, to discern them intuitively, as by a spiritual and interior sense of taste, and to enjoy them It makes it possible for us, immediately a thing is presented for our consideration, to judge whether it be of God or not, whether it will lead us to a closer union with Him, or be a barrier to

our spiritual advance "Wisdom," says St Francis de Sales, "is simply love which tastes and experiences the goodness and sweetness of God,"<sup>1</sup> but this definition must be guarded by recalling the judgment of St Thomas that Wisdom does not consist in the mere taste for divine things, but rather in the judgment which we make instinctively as a result of the tasting<sup>2</sup>

Wisdom, like every other Gift, is to be developed, although, as we have seen, this work of development is no active work of ours. We yield ourselves to the Spirit, and He, when He finds us passive in His hands, will Himself do the work. There are analogies in the natural world of what the fruit of this development is. In the physical and mental spheres there are those who are trained to have a delicate and discriminating taste. There are men who can distinguish instantly the subtlest difference between certain wines, while there are those who cannot tell one kind from another. The same is true in art. There is a subtle, intangible quality in a painting which declares it to him who has eyes to see to be from the brush of a certain artist. He cannot tell you what the signs are, but he knows with a certainty which admits of no question. A similar office is performed by Wisdom in the spiritual sphere. But the Spirit does not perfect this power in us at a single stroke. In the course of the perfecting of the Gifts we will make mistakes and show poor judgment, but God overlooks these if the intention be pure. But as the power of Wisdom is more and more increased, more and more shall we have that right judgment in all things for which the Church prays in her great Collect for Pentecost. We shall more and more truly

<sup>1</sup> St Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, XI 15

<sup>2</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, 2, 2, Q 45, Art 2

know that which comes from God, and be enabled to taste and see how sweet the Lord is

By this exercise of Wisdom we form spiritual judgments, we lay hold of this, and set that aside, in such a manner as makes it possible for us to go straight forward to God, to recognize divine things, to taste their sweetness and richly to enjoy them. The contemplation of God in love is a putting into action the Gift of Wisdom, an actual experiencing of divine joy and sweetness, just as one by a sense of taste not only perceives a certain delicious food to be good, but by the same sense goes on to enjoy it

It is the Gift of Wisdom which we see in action in the life and work of great saints, and it is this which sometimes makes their writings almost incomprehensible to us who, lower in the scale of sanctity, lack their keenness of spiritual taste. We read the works of such spirits as St. Teresa or St. John of the Cross, and find them discriminating in exact statement and with exquisite fineness between certain modes and degrees of prayer, which to the ordinary soul have no meaning. We are incapable of drawing the distinction which to the saints stands out so boldly. The saints are able to contemplate with joy which they are not able to express, things which others have no power of perceiving because their taste has not been cultivated; it is dull and jaded because they have vitiated it in the enjoyment of lower things, the things of the world and the things of self. And yet God intends that in the measure He wills, every soul should develop this taste for the divine which was infused into him when in baptism he received the Gift of Wisdom. The prayer used by the Bishop when he administers the Sacrament of Confirmation, in which the possession of these Gifts is confirmed to

us, speaks of this development. He prays that the confirmed "may daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more until he come to Thine everlasting kingdom."

As with all other faculties or powers, these Gifts increase in proportion as they are exercised within us. He who gives his attention always to God and to divine things, who, while perhaps compelled to look to the study and care of the things of the world, yet never fails to consider them from the standpoint of God, in him will inevitably be developed more and more the gifts and powers which will bring him into the life of contemplation, and enable him with ever clearer perception to understand and enjoy the sweetness of God.

The three Gifts we have been considering are the principal agencies in the hands of the Holy Ghost for the development of the life of contemplation. He in whom the Gifts of Understanding and Wisdom are exercised is with every such exercise growing in the power of contemplation, and the like exercise of Knowledge clears the way for an ever-deepening spirit of contemplation, and lays under tribute everything in human life, compelling it to serve the soul in the soul's service of God.

But the other Gifts are by no means to be excluded, for they have their place even though they do not operate in the same manner. When the work of contemplation becomes hard, when the "dark night of the soul" settles down, the Gift of Fortitude or Ghostly Strength comes into action to enable the soul to hold fast, and to endure with courage and perseverance the pains of distraction, and the spiritual dullness and aridity, all of which are normal and inevitable in the life of prayer.



The Gift of Piety develops in us that filial love and devotion, that true spirit of sonship by which we are made conscious of an ever-deepening yearning after union with the Father. A glance shows us the necessity of the operation of this Gift in the life employed in contemplating the Divine Father.

Counsel, which is closely allied to Wisdom, enables us to make, as it were, in a flash, and with little or no formal consideration of the pros and cons, profound and far-reaching decisions affecting our spiritual course; while over all the contemplative life there stands as a sleepless sentinel the Gift of Holy Fear which is "the chaste and venerating reverence that flows from the touch of the Holy Spirit on the will, moving the soul to revere our heavenly Father with ease and promptitude, and to dread offending Him"<sup>1</sup>. It is this Gift that stands sentinel at the door of the heart, and sounds the alarm to warn us of the approach of anything that might wound or offend Him in whose presence we seek to hold ourselves at loving attention.

<sup>1</sup> Ullathorne, *Christian Patience*, pp. 170-71

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE EXERCISES OF THE WILL AND AFFECTIONS

It is time we were considering the constituent parts of the prayer of contemplation, and in dealing with the subject we shall follow chiefly the lines laid down by Father Baker. He teaches that active mystical contemplation, by which expression he distinguishes the form of prayer we are discussing from extraordinary prayer, "is exercised in a prayer which consists either in acts of the will or in aspirations"<sup>1</sup> Either of these exercises, accompanied by the proper spiritual dispositions, constitutes contemplation. Father Baker calls the prayer of forced acts "imperfect contemplation" (but contemplation none the less, for strictly speaking there is no perfect contemplation in this life), while the prayer of aspiration he regards as "proper and perfect contemplation"<sup>2</sup> Of course, the word perfect is here used as we have seen it used by St Thomas, and all other guides, to indicate, not a state to which nothing needs to be added, but to imply that those who are able to engage in the prayer of aspiration have fully entered the way of contemplation, although a long journey lies ahead of them. Neither Dom Baker nor his disciple, Dom Cuthbert Butler, leaves us in doubt as to the exact point at which the soul enters upon contemplation. The latter says, "When a soul

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Confessions*, p. 47

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, *Sacra Sophia*, p. 432

quits discursive meditation, and ceases from the operations of the imagination and reasoning in its prayers, so that the prayer becomes wholly the workings of the affections and acts of the will—all which may, and very frequently does, arrive in a short time after the beginning of a spiritual course—it has then entered on the way of contemplation, and is exercising contemplative prayer, the beginnings of it only, still really and truly the thing itself”<sup>1</sup>

We note that the acts we are to consider are called forced, thus implying a certain absence of spontaneity. This does not mean that emotional spontaneity must always be absent from such prayers. There are souls who have a natural gift, or it may be supernatural, which enables them always, or at any rate frequently, to approach prayer with a joyous enthusiasm and eagerness; but such souls are rare, nor is this emotional reaching out after God in any sense necessary. It may or may not be present. It does not matter in the least whether it be present or absent, provided the soul be led by love. Often it will happen that, so far as the natural spirit is concerned, the soul will not wish to make these acts at all. The heart will seem as dry as dust, and there will seem to be no inner response to the words of faith, hope, love, joy, or whatever else we are seeking to express.

But he would be a novice in this field, and a stupid novice at that, who would always look for felt joy and consolation in the life of prayer. The history of spirituality in the Church through the ages gives no ground for any such expectation. The earnest and wise soul will at this point keep in mind two great principles. The first is that apparent coldness, dullness

<sup>1</sup> Butler, *Benedictine Monachism*, p. 107

of heart, aridity, and an absence of all sense of desire for God, are wholly normal aspects of the spiritual life. These conditions are found everywhere amongst those who are really seeking God. Indeed, we can say that their presence is a definite, and in most cases a necessary, sign of a really seeking soul. Those who are not in earnest, not willing to pay the cost in suffering in order to attain to God, are never conscious of such arid conditions, whereas those who are resolutely pursuing the higher paths of prayer are called upon to endure these things. Their presence presents no cause for alarm or anxiety. On the other hand, if we never felt this sense of desolation, then we should be fearful lest God had departed from us. In one of the most fervent and loving outpourings of the heart of a saint to God, the psalmist called to Him from a "barren and dry land where no water is", and in meditating on God's tender goodness in the most consoling of the psalms, he, with seeming abruptness, reverts to the thought of the "valley of the shadow of death" which lies across the path of righteousness, and protests that in its dark ways he will fear no evil, for he is assured that God is with him, that the divine rod and staff will be his comfort. He was speaking out of the wealth of his experience, and his experience has been that of God's servants in every age.

The second truth is that life, in whatever sphere, whether it be in the closer walks with God or in worldly occupation, is never to be lived on impulse, but on principle. The world's work would soon fall into chaos if men laboured when they felt like it, and refrained as soon as the emotional impulse was spent. By forced acts of the will they compel themselves to go on faithfully, and thus is skill and facility acquired, and the

work of the race accomplished. This holds good in spiritual things as well as in secular business, and ultimate success will be gained only by compelling ourselves to undertake the work of prayer, as a man compels himself to go to his daily toil, not because he always likes it, but because he knows that it is his duty, and that only in this way can anything be achieved.

Likewise, in these exercises we are to make our acts of faith, hope, love, praise, adoration, resignation to God's will, humility, thanksgiving, etc., with earnest resolution, regardless of whether we wish at the moment to make them or not. This wish, or the absence of it, lies in the lower nature, and the impulses of the lower nature are never to sway us. If we can say that in spite of the absence of conscious feeling or desire, we really want to love God, and to be at one with Him, nothing else is necessary. We set the will to work, and compel ourselves to do the thing we know we ought to do. We override the mere superficial feeling. Even if the eagerness is present, we do not perform these acts because of that eagerness of desire, although it may be a help at the time. We perform them regardless of any such feeling. "Whatever you have to do, do it no longer because it is your inclination, but purely because it is God's will"<sup>1</sup>. If we do not at times have to force ourselves to these acts, well and good, but even where in the beginning of our period of prayer no use of force is necessary, the emotional impulse is not likely to last long. From its nature, it quickly grows weary. In the main, any regular, long-continued practice of these acts will have to be a forced process, in which the will, not the emotions, governs and controls. A little hardness is enough to put the emotions to

<sup>1</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Letter*, May 21, 1616

flight, but the will is more courageous With every faithful soul it will be as in Dante's vision—

“ Yet the will rolled onward, like a wheel  
In even motion, by the love impelled  
That moves the sun in heaven and all the stars ” <sup>1</sup>

This is, after all, only the accepted psychological principle that we learn by doing St Francis de Sales presents it in a striking passage “ There are many,” he says, “ who want me to tell them of methods and systems and secret ways of becoming perfect, and I can only tell them that the sole secret lies in a hearty love of God, and the only way of attaining that love is by loving You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working; and just so you learn to love God and man by loving .

If you want to love God, go on loving Him more and more; never look back, press forward continually Begin as a mere apprentice, and the very power of love will lead you on to become a master in the art ” <sup>2</sup>

What particular form should be given to these acts? Each soul must find its own method as the Spirit may direct it But in all cases let there be ejaculations of love, of hope and faith, of praise and thanksgiving, of resignation, of wonder, admiration and joy, as the soul seeks to dwell upon the beauty of God The sweet and powerful Name of Jesus may be repeated in decades, ten times in honour, first of the Father, then in honour of the Son Himself, and again in honour of the Holy Spirit; in praise of the divine Unity, and in praise and adoration of the Holy and Ineffable Trinity This use of the Holy Name, which has been tested practi-

<sup>1</sup> Dante, *Il Paradiso*, Canto xxxiii

<sup>2</sup> *The Spirit of St Francis de Sales* (Lear edition), p 3

cally and successfully by many earnest souls, constitutes a swift rosary of love which will do much to maintain the soul in the steady, and ever more loving, contemplation of the Divine Majesty

In the appendices of Father Baker's great work, *Sancta Sophia*, the vocal exercises of contemplative prayer which he gathered from the rich treasury of many saints illustrate the Benedictine method of his time, the seventeenth century. In the older Benedictine devotion, everything revolved around the Divine Office and the Liturgy, in the consideration of which the devout monk found material upon which to base his work of contemplation. The Carthusian method of the same period finds its interpretation in the devotions set forth in the great compilation of prayers arranged by John Michael of Coutances, and what the reformed Carmelites thought of vocal prayer as a help to contemplation is shown by the circumstance that when St. Teresa was asked by her nuns to teach them the way of perfection, the instruction she gave them as to their life of consecration and devotion was based largely on the words of the Our Father. Speaking of this prayer she said, "You see how it contains in itself the whole spiritual life from the beginning to that point where the soul is drawn into God who gives it to drink abundantly of this fountain of living water, which, as I have told you, is to be found at the end of the road"<sup>1</sup>. In this last expression the saint is referring to the highest and purest kind of contemplation. In a previous chapter of her great work on perfection she describes this high form of prayer in these same words, assuring her disciples that by conformity to the divine will they will "arrive in a very short time at the end of

<sup>1</sup> St. Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, XLII 7

their journey, and quench their thirst at the last with the living waters of contemplation ” <sup>1</sup>

It is sometimes objected that to many these acts seem wholly unreal. Is it honest for them to say again and again, “Jesus, I love Thee,” when they feel little or no stirring of love in their hearts, their actual love not being sufficient to keep them from sinning frequently against Him? They shrink from saying, “I believe in Thee,” when they are painfully conscious that their faith is weak. Such objectors lose sight of the fact that these acts are acts of the will, not expressions of the emotions. Nor are they made for the purpose of expressing or displaying the beauty of a completed spiritual fabric, but rather is each act to be compared to a stone which is being laid in the walls of a spiritual structure which is in painful and laborious process of building. Expression of these emotions is entirely negligible, while acts of the will are declared by the masters of the Christian life to be the most sublime and efficacious that man can perform.

The expression of definitely willed acts of love and faith is not only an evidence of the presence of love and faith, but it is even more. It is an exercise of these virtues which causes them to expand and increase. Baron von Hügel puts it in a homely but trenchant fashion when he says, “I kiss my child not only because I love it, I kiss it also in order to love it. A religious picture not only expresses my awakened faith; it is a help to my Faith’s awakening ” <sup>2</sup> I tell God that I love Him not only because love imperiously demands expression, but because I long to love Him.

<sup>1</sup> St Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, XXXII 8

<sup>2</sup> Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 251



more and more; and every such act adds fuel to the flame of my love.

When to God "all angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the powers therein"; when to Him "cherubim and seraphim continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," they are expressing what really fills their hearts; but their capacity for loving and praising God increases through the ages of eternity, and their expressions of devotion, whatever they are, are part of the means employed for the expanding of this capacity. The difference between us and these blessed ones is that we are on the way, while they are already in possession of the perfection of the heavenly life. It is possible for us by sin to lose our grace, our union with God, while they have been confirmed for ever in the rich blessings of union which they have received. There is, nevertheless, a very close relation between our state and theirs. The difference between the saints in heaven and the saints on earth (we are using the expression in the New Testament sense, meaning all baptized souls who are in the grace of God) is one of degree. Like them, we possess the virtue of love, for it was infused into us at our baptism, although, unlike them, we can forfeit it through mortal sin. Like them we exercise love, and like them through this exercise we strengthen and increase it. When I perform an act of love, whether in my mind, in speech, or in external deed, I am really being loving, just as when I think or do something cruel I am in actual accomplished fact being cruel.

It might be said, "Yes, but I so often feel a positive distaste for these acts of devotion which I am asked to make." This makes no difference. I may feel a distaste for performing an act of cruelty, but if, to

please another, I keep on with acts of cruelty, I shall inevitably develop a cruel character, and the distaste will be replaced by a satisfaction in being cruel, and by a desire to act with cruelty. In like manner, though I feel a distaste for loving acts, for this protesting to God that I love Him, yet if I keep on doing so, willing and desiring always to love Him, I will inevitably develop a loving character. Loving acts produce loving character as evil acts produce evil character. All that is required is the energizing will and intention to love, even though the emotional sense or desire for love be absent. It is under these conditions that forced acts enter in. Persistent practice and self-discipline will bring to pass the desired state of prayer. If we compel ourselves courageously to go through the required exercises of devotion, the end will be attained as surely as persistent practice in the use of proper tools and exercises will bring us to proficiency in an art or handicraft.

But this illustration which we have just used cannot be carried too far. Force themselves to practice as they may, there are certain men who can never become musicians or artists, simply because there is nothing in them which can be developed along these lines. Have I, then, the capacity for becoming proficient in the practice of loving prayer? Without the least hesitation we answer in the affirmative. Every human soul, without a single exception in the history of the race, is created in the possession of a limitless capacity to love and to praise God. The whole being is formed to that end. This is the sole ultimate vocation. When we were created, the perfect Artificer endowed us with the power to do this very thing. Every living soul has this faculty, and no sin or neglect can ever in this world eliminate it.

Those who have long neglected God may require to go through long and painful courses in the exercise of love before attaining proficiency, but all attain to it if they keep on trying, however slow their progress may be. As St Teresa says, some creep, some wall, some run, but all who keep on going will reach the goal.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE PRAYER OF ASPIRATION

BEFORE proceeding to the consideration of the prayer of aspiration, it might be well for us once more to glance at the relation which the various degrees of progress in prayer bear to one another. We have seen that while we are still in the primary walks of prayer we have to seek God by means of vocal prayer and meditation, but as the soul becomes more purified by mortification and detachment, more and more will it be led into affective prayer, the acts of which are for a time forced and laboured because divine charity is not yet in full possession of the soul. But as the affective habit is developed, as it surely will be by these exercises, love is able to claim more and more of our life, and the work of mortification and detachment gains greater impetus. The acts of the will and of the affections are performed with greater facility, until they pass into strong and spontaneous aspirations of love, the latter being the normal manner in which the habit which has now been formed will express itself. These aspirations constitute the practice of what Father Baker calls "proper and perfect contemplation," and with continued practice the soul is enabled to advance until the affections flow promptly, easily and sweetly, and with a calm which bears evidence of the depth of the current of its love. With this brief

résumé, let us go on to consider the nature of these aspirations

When we come to look at this element in contemplative prayer, at first we find difficulty in discriminating between aspirations and the forced acts of devotion which we have just studied. Father Baker speaks of them as "two distinct exercises," but goes on to say that they differ from each other but little as to form and substance. Indeed, when he comes to give us examples of aspiration, what he cites is little more than forms which are equally used in ordinary ejaculatory and affective prayer. He offers such familiar expressions as, "My God, when shall I love Thee alone!" "O my God, Thou alone sufficest me!" "Let me be nothing, and be Thou all, O my God!" "O Love, O Love, O infinite and universal Love!" The distinction lies, he tells us, in "the facility wherewith they are produced, without force, foresight, or election, purely flowing from an internal impulse of the divine Spirit"; and for this reason he gives them "another name, and calls them not acts, but aspirations"<sup>1</sup>

One marked difference between them and acts of affective prayer is that the latter are more often than not characterized by a certain rush of emotion, a devotional impetuosity which drives the soul with great energy along the way of love. This is precisely what does not belong to the prayer of contemplation. Prayer which has such a quality cannot possibly be aspirative in the sense in which this word is used. This rush of devotion, however valuable in its own place, indicates the kind of activity which is inconsistent with true contemplation, for it definitely destroys that

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, pp. 431, 432, and 510. The whole of ch. II p. 509 *sqq.*, should be studied.

passive attitude in which the soul does little and God is able to do much

Descriptions of prayer are too often illusive. They are couched in sweet and attractive language, but we find it hard to recognize what is intended. We will be assisted in understanding Father Baker's distinctions if we hear the teaching of Walter Hilton which he sets forth in his quaint and powerful fashion. In this contemplative exercise of aspiration, the soul, he says, "prayeth not in that manner as it did before, but in full great stillness of voice, and softness of heart. For why? His mind is not troubled nor hindered with outward things, but wholly gathered together into itself. And the soul is set, as it were, in the spiritual presence of Jesus, and therefore every word and every syllable is sounded savourly, sweetly, and delectably, with full accord of mouth and of heart. For why? The soul is then turned all into the fire of love. And, therefore, every word that it secretly prayeth is like a spark rising out of a burning fire, which heateth all the powers of the soul, and turneth them into love, and enlighteneth them so comfortably that the soul listeth ever to pray, and to do nothing else. The more it prayeth, the better it may, and the mightier it is. For grace helpeth the soul well, and maketh all things light and easy, that it delighteth to chant and sing the lovings of God with spiritual mirth in heavenly delight."

The old Augustinian declares that "this prayer is a rich offering filled with all the fatness of devotion, received by angels and presented to the face of Jesus." "This prayer is always heard of Jesus. It yieldeth grace to Jesus and receiveth grace again. It maketh a soul familiar, as it were, hail-fellow, with Jesus,

and with all the angels in heaven Use it whoso can, the work is good and gracious in itself And although it be not altogether perfect contemplation in itself, nor the working of love by itself, nevertheless it is in part contemplation, and the soul which hath this freedom and spiritual savour in praying hath the grace of contemplation ”

In his eagerness to show seeking souls something of what this prayer of aspiration is, that God through this praying may be glorified, Hilton essays further to express that which cannot be expressed, to define that which is indefinable “ The soul,” he says, “ is turned into the eye, and sharply beholdeth the face of Jesus, and is made sure that it is Jesus that it feeleth and seeth I do not mean Jesus as He is in Himself, in fullness of His blessed Godhead , but I mean Jesus as He is pleased to show Himself to a clean soul For thou must know that every feeling of grace is Jesus and may be called Jesus And according as the grace is more or less, so feeleth the soul more or less of Jesus . And be not afraid, though Jesus whom thou feelest be not Jesus as He is in His full Godhead, but trust thou well, if thou be a lover of Jesus, that thy feeling is true, and that Jesus is truly felt and seen of thee through His grace, as thou canst see Him here And therefore trust fully to thy feeling when it is gracious and spiritual, and keep it tenderly, and have great dainty, not of thyself, but of it, that thou mayest see and feel Jesus still better and better. For grace shall ever teach thee by itself, if thou wilt fall thereto, till thou come to the end ”

Hilton closes this magnificent chapter with an apologia for the confusion of terms which was inevitable in seeking to define such mysterious processes “ But perchance,” he says, “ thou beginnest to wonder why

I say one time that grace worketh all this, and another time that love worketh, or God worketh. Unto this I answer thus: That when I say that grace worketh, I mean both love and Jesus and God, for all is one, and nought but one. Jesus is love, Jesus is grace, Jesus is God. And because He worketh all in us by His grace for love, as He is God, therefore may I use which of these four words I list''<sup>1</sup>

Keeping close to the actual meaning of the word, aspirations are compared with the bodily action of breathing. The soul being inflamed with divine love, breathes forth its ardent affections to God, and as the action of breathing does not depend upon the will, likewise the soul that is one with God breathes forth its aspirations of love and devotion through the operation of an interior habit, and does not have to make a conscious, deliberate use of the will for every such aspiration. Again, it is said that just as the bodily breathing goes on without cessation, although the attention of the will is not in any way directed to it, so the faculties generally can be engaged in various occupations without any interruption of the Godward flow of loving aspiration.

The difference between the use of aspirations in contemplative prayer, and the same forms used in meditation or affective prayer, seems to be analogous to the distinction which we have found to exist between meditation and contemplation. The employment of aspirations in meditation, and even affective prayer, are accompanied by processes of reasoning and the use of analysis, while in contemplation they are used without the exercise of the reasoning or argumentative faculty, God being comprehended (so far as He can

<sup>1</sup> Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk III, ch vii



be comprehended at all) as it were in a single glance. In its contemplative aspirations the soul rejoices in His omnipotent love, in His goodness and beauty, without seeking in any discursive way to arrive at an intellectual understanding of any of the particulars of His revelation of Himself. Father Baker calls this use of aspiration "proper and perfect contemplation," and in describing the attitude of the soul who prays thus, he gives us one of the finest of his many fine sayings. "If such souls," he says, "were to give an account of what they conceive in their minds when they intend to think of God, all that they could say would be, God is nothing of all that I can say or think, but a Being infinitely beyond it, and absolutely incomprehensible by a created understanding. He is what He is, and what Himself only perfectly knows, and so I believe Him to be, and as such I adore and love Him only, I renounce all pretending to a distinct knowing of Him, and content myself with such a blind believing."<sup>1</sup>

The period of transition from forced acts of devotion to this use of aspiration may be difficult; it often lacks any joy or spontaneity, and it follows no fixed law. We may read the experiences of the few saints who have left us a record of their prayer life, and certain suggestions of spiritual masters may be a help, but we cannot remind ourselves too often that God does not deal with souls *en masse*, nor does He lay down rules for special groups. His Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and if it were possible to know His interior methods with souls generally, we should probably find that He never deals with any two souls alike. As a rule, this transition is gradual, so gradual that the soul, humbly pressing on in the work of prayer, may pass from the

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, pp. 511-12

lower to the higher without being aware of it. But this rule is not without exceptions, and it sometimes happens that in the midst of a barren and dry land, while one is earnestly engaged in what may seem to be thankless and unprofitable acts of devotion to God, suddenly all barriers are swept away, and they are transformed from halting and difficult exercises into acts of transcending sweetness and joy, welling up out of the heart without effort or strain. But in any event we can be certain that if the soul is faithful and persevering, God will not fail to lead it, in His own time and manner, into the higher ways of devotion. It is for the soul to do its part, and wait on God in perfect trust.

Father Baker sets forth the manner of making these aspirations, showing that they may be produced in a variety of ways<sup>1</sup>. He calls our attention again to the connection between vocal prayer and contemplation. We have already seen that contemplation is sustained, made vertebrate in many instances by the use of vocal ejaculations, and these vocal exercises often persist even in the very highest forms of prayer, short of raptures, ecstasy and other miraculous operations. Speaking of certain cases where contemplative souls expressed their devotion in strange and unusual external actions, he says that "the saying of the Divine Office, or other vocal prayers, *aspiratively*, is a far greater proof of sublime contemplation than any of those unusual motions". He gives an account of one soul who daily said a portion of the Divine Office which he happened to know by heart, using its parts as aspirations, and sometimes repeating it as many as ten times a day with firm recollection of God whose love and

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, pp 515-16

beauty he was thus contemplating, and in his *Confessions* he tells us how he himself used the Mass as the larger part of his contemplation, saying it "aspiratively, or with elevations of the will, which," he says, "I esteem to be aspirations" <sup>1</sup>

Again, such aspirations may be expressed in words formed before the mind, or even with the lips, but used over and over again St Francis's prayer, "*Deus meus et omnia*, My God and my All," he is said to have repeated many hundreds of times through the long hours of the night as he contemplated the divine glory and beauty. This method of aspiration has been a very common one in the contemplation of the saints, and their example has been followed with profit by multitudes of devout souls. The words are repeated with an ever intenser concentration of devotion, the soul continuing to call upon God, upon whom the whole will and attention is set in a simple gaze of love, all mental pictures or reasonings being eliminated. Sometimes these aspirations do not take an intelligent form of expression, but consist of inarticulate cries to God, there being no human language which is capable of expressing in words what the soul at such times would say to Him.

If one dare to make any comparisons in considering these methods of aspiration, the highest form of them is what Father Baker calls the "purely mental." These consist in elevations of the heart to God, swift uprisings of the spirit. These in their beginning may be to some extent imaginative, but as the prayer becomes more mature, the aspirations become more subtle. They grow to depend less, and finally not at all, on the imagination, and take the form of pure

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Confessions*, p. 107

elevations of the will to God in love It is at this point that "we speak to God and He speaks to us We aspire to Him, and breathe in Him, and He reciprocally inspires us and breathes on us And of what do we discourse? Of what can love discourse but of the Beloved? Where love reigns, the sound of exterior words is not necessary, the soul alone treats with God alone, speaks to God, and hears God speak Eyes speak to eyes, and heart to heart, and none understands what passes save the lovers who speak" <sup>1</sup>

It is here that the soul exercises the prayer of quiet, and imposes silence upon all the other powers, upon the intellect, the imagination, the memory, the senses "The faculties are reluctant to stir," says St Teresa "All action seems to impede their loving of God, and yet they are not entirely lost, for they can and do realize, by peaceful contemplation, in whose presence they are" <sup>2</sup> But the will is in complete command, holding the soul in unbroken gaze upon God

In such exercises, says Father Baker, the will is "so wholly possessed and inflamed with divine love, which doth so intimately penetrate into the very centre of it that it is become like fiery, burning steel, clean through shining with this fire It is now a will deiform, and in a manner deified, for it is so closely united and hidden in the divine will that God may be said to will and do all things in and by her" <sup>3</sup> Such are the effects of contemplation as produced and sustained by these sublime exercises

At times, in the course of our prayer, the flight will seem to fail, the fire to die down St Teresa offers

<sup>1</sup> St Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, VI 1

<sup>2</sup> St Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, XXXI 2

<sup>3</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p 518

here a practical and beautiful suggestion. She compares the failing prayer to a fire almost burnt out. We have all had the experience. There are only a few coals left glowing darkly in the ashes. We gather them together with gentle handling. We blow our breath upon them, rekindling the flame, but all very gently, for too rough a breath would quench them wholly. So she says, when the fire of love seems to be failing, "we may make a gentle aspiration, as one blows a fire that is going out in order to rekindle it," not rousing ourselves with great energy lest the very energy we employ defeat our aim, and the stillness of our attitude before God be destroyed by the violence of our effort. "No composing of long sentences of prayer," says the saint, "lest the peace of the will be broken. With sweet murmurings of love to God we encourage the fainting spirit, and draw it back again to its repose in the calm of the divine presence" <sup>1</sup>

The faithful practice of this prayer in the state of life in which we find ourselves is all that is required. No external activities, however exacting, will really interfere if we are persistent and do not lose heart. Some of the greatest contemplatives in the Church's history lived the most active lives. Certainly no one could think of St. Paul as living a sheltered life, remote from turmoil and distraction, and St. Francis, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Teresa are further striking instances of this. The Church, so far as the history of souls is known, produced no greater contemplatives. They were the recipients of the most profound mystical favours, dwelling on the heights to which we dare not lift our eyes, and yet they were incessantly engaged in the most engrossing external works, travelling hither

<sup>1</sup> St. Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, XXXI 6

and thither, planning and executing great enterprises which required time and thought, but all the while they kept a cloister in their hearts where they were in constant retirement with God. They were able to do all this, not because they possessed some spiritual essential which we lack, they reached the heights and dwelt there continually because they were resolute to take God everywhere with them as companion and lover, and they never faltered in their endeavour to fulfil this high resolve.

Nor did they succeed through the use of any superior natural faculty for loving God, for there is no such natural faculty. All this is supernatural, and none can have it save as an infused gift from God, nor can any man develop the gift save through the direct aid of divine grace. They succeeded because God came to their succour as He is waiting to come to ours. They consecrated themselves to Him and He would not be outdone in generosity. He gave them their hearts' desire as He will give us ours. Their great and all-possessing love of God was not theirs all at once. They began with little, but they did violence to themselves, to their natural inclination, and by sheer obstinacy of will power they saw to it that the things were done which could not fail to lead to increase.

As time goes on, the soul will find less need of this violence to self, this compulsion of will, for if we can come to love God even a little, our inward vision will be continually towards Him, for love is the spring of the soul's desire. If I am in a great company of people, beset with the noise and distraction of the throng, and there is one present whom I love above all others and with my whole heart, shall I not be continually turning my thought and gaze in his direction?

Amidst the many things which annoy and distract, if there is love for God in my heart, I shall continually be seeking Him, for the longing for contemplation has its motive force in the love of the object of contemplation. As it has been said, "Where love is, there is the eye—*ubi amor, ibi oculus*"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard of St Victor, *De Praep ad Contempl* ch. xiii

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE EXCELLENCE OF CONTEMPLATION

IN order to pray well it is necessary to have a right idea of Him to whom we pray. A false notion of God will inevitably give us a perverted idea of the nature of prayer. Therefore it is the primary excellence of contemplation, as compared with other forms of prayer, that it affords us the truest mental conception of God of which we are capable. The human intellect can apprehend God by faith only, and when we see by faith we see as in a glass, darkly. We cannot comprehend God clearly, for the finite mind cannot compass the Infinite. When those who are not skilled in theology and, therefore, unable to test the validity of their ideas concerning the divine revelation, undertake to bring clearly before their minds God and His attributes and nature, as we often do in meditation, considering what the human mind is, and what God is, an image or conception is produced which is at best imperfect and inadequate, and which is perhaps more often misleading, if not quite erroneous. The safer way for most of us, therefore, is to regard Him with the eye of faith, content neither to rationalize nor to particularize overmuch, but rather to hold before the mind a general, wholly unanalysed conception of Him as the omnipotent, the all-wise, the all-loving, the tender and compassionate One, changeless in His justice which is His loving-kindness. This con-



ception is sure to be true The other may easily be false

This will make little appeal to those who exalt the reason practically as though it were a sort of divinity, before whom there must be no other gods. They say that they must be intellectually honest, and this claim is, of course, true, but it too often means that they refuse to recognize the fact that ultimately faith is the basis of all reasoning, for in whatever sphere we may be reasoning, if we go far enough back we shall always find that an act of faith in something or somebody is inescapable There are others who may feel that this method does not thrust the act of faith far enough back in the reasoning process, but however that may be (and there is something to be said for it), this is the counsel of many wise teachers, who recognize the intellect only as an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit In a beautiful and complicated paradox, the pseudo-Dionysius urges us "to aspire to enter into this translucent obscurity in order that we might see and know precisely by means of this mystical ignorance, Him who is invisible and unknowable" <sup>1</sup>

Father Baker tells us that "faith informs us of His divine totality and incomprehensibility, and this only is truth, whereas all distinct images are but imperfect shadows of truth" <sup>2</sup> St John of the Cross, in a passage full of charm for its paradox, tells

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Saudreau, *The Life of Union*, No 65 Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, Ch II We are not to be unmindful here of the argument which St Augustine presented to Consentius in his 120th Epistle, to the effect that in order to make an act of faith one has first to find a reason for it But this does not mean that it has to be worked out by reasoning processes A little child has reason for trusting its father, but the reason was not arrived at by conscious processes of logic

<sup>2</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p 435

us that "one of the greatest gifts of God to the soul in this life is that deep sense and understanding of God by which it feels and understands clearly that it can neither understand nor feel Him at all,"<sup>1</sup> and a writer of our own time shows us that the soul by its very union of love with God "receives a light which makes it understand that God is the incomprehensible, ineffable Being, and this is the true knowledge of God"<sup>2</sup>

The conclusion of all this must be that so long as the understanding grasps clearly the point we in our meditation may be considering regarding God, we know that we are not thinking God, but only thinking about Him. It may be, it often will be, a very precious truth, but it is not God, for the infinite God cannot be grasped by the human intellect. We are only dealing with something that leads to God. "No man hath seen God at any time." Let the reasoning faculty be conscious of a satisfaction in knowing intellectually, and we can then be sure that we are studying about God, and not studying God. This is not easy to express, but we must get the distinction clear, or we shall fail to grasp what contemplation is, for contemplation consists not in thinking about God, but in experiencing God. The agnostic is right when he says we cannot know God through reason. Reason can tell us much about God, indeed, we can say that it was given to us just in order that we might learn about Him. But it is only one of the ways that lead to God, and so important a way is it that without reason we could not have our appointed part in finding Him. But the more closely we approach Him, the

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *Spiritual Maxims*, 28 (Lewis)

<sup>2</sup> Saudreau, *The Mystical State*, p. 9

more does the soul leave reason behind, and standing amidst "the luminous darkness," realizes God with something which is a dim foresight of the vision with which it will be blessed when it sees Him face to face

Meditation, as we have seen, seeks knowledge through exercising the understanding and the imagination, while contemplation seeks and obtains an increase of love. This love, be it remembered, is of divine origin; it is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost"; and if we allow it to govern our wills, it "will become so firmly established in the soul, so wholly and only filling and possessing it, that it will become, as it were, a new soul unto the soul" <sup>1</sup>

At this point might be injected the question often asked, Why is contemplation said to be the highest and most excellent mode of prayer? The answer is ready and simple. Because in a manner and measure found in no other kind of prayer it tends to increase the power of love. That which directly invokes love and augments it is always of higher excellence.

In making this distinction, however, we must not forget that where persons are involved, love is the surest path to knowledge. The more I love my friend, the better I know him. The object of all prayer, of all religion, is union with God, and the sole means of union is love. Love is the unitive virtue, and its operation brings the desired union to pass. St. Clement of Alexandria explains to us how this comes about. "The property of love," he says, "is that those who love desire to resemble each other, so that at length there is established between them a perfect community of thought, feeling and affection" <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 401

<sup>2</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, II. 9

We note that this desire for likeness is mutual, and we should have no hesitancy in implying that God, in His infinite and omnipotent love, condescends to desire to be like us. But we are not to think that He desires to be like unto us in our infirmity, much less in our sin. His desire is a real one, and it lies behind all His efforts to make man like unto Himself, and this desire is fulfilled when He is able to exalt man to the divine likeness. Then He is able to see Himself in us, and it is to this end that He seeks to draw the soul into a life of loving contemplation, in order that through dwelling continually upon Him we may become ever more and more like unto Him through the unifying power of love.

St John of the Cross expresses this in a passage of rare subtlety. "This thread of love," he says, "binds the two—that is to say, God and the soul—with such firmness, and so unites and transforms them, and makes them one in love, that although they differ in substance, yet in glory and in appearance the soul seems to be God, and God the soul. Such is this union. The principal Lover here is God Himself, who, with the omnipotence of His boundless love, absorbs the soul in Himself with more efficacy and force than that of a torrent of fire absorbing a drop of morning dew"<sup>1</sup>. In another place St John prays, "Let me be so transformed in Thy beauty that, being alike in beauty, we may both see ourselves in Thy beauty, since I shall have Thine own beauty, so that, when one of us looks at the other, each may see in the other his beauty, the beauty of both being Thy beauty alone, and I being absorbed in Thy beauty,

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, p. 358

and then I shall see Thee in Thy beauty, and Thou shalt see me in Thy beauty" <sup>1</sup>

Analogies to contemplation are found in certain attitudes of soul in the natural sphere. St Francis de Sales is one of our chief guides in this study. He mentions amongst these a mother watching over her child's cradle, and lovingly dwelling in thought upon him, perhaps for hours together without any logical sequence of thought or argument; and also the child lying at peace in the mother's arms, happy and content, without any reasoned consideration of what is going on. Or, two friends remaining in each other's company for a long period, saying nothing, without any formal reflection or reasoning concerning each other, but simply enjoying the happiness of being together in tranquillity and silence. "Thus," says the saint, "the soul, reposing in the presence of God, extracts almost insensibly the sweetness of this presence, without speech, without action, without any sort of activity on the part of any one of its functions, unless it be by the sole point of the will and of the affections" <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, pp 380-81. An interesting piece of word study might profitably be made here. *Theology* and *theologian* are two words which suggest to our minds scholarly erudition in the science of religion. In the early days of the Church these words carried no such meaning. *Theology*, according to the Fathers, indicated a knowledge of God obtained, not by study, but by prayer, and a *theologian* was a man who had acquired an intimacy with God through contemplation rather than by investigations of reason. Two quotations will suffice to illustrate. St John Climacus says, "Those may rightly be called theologians who in prayer are penetrated and inflamed with a fire that is sacred and all divine" (*The Ladder*, 28th Degree), and St. Ephrem the Syrian writes, "Let us apply ourselves to the spiritual life in order that we may become perfect. Only thus can we become learned in theology" (*De Virtute*, Chap. X). See Lamballe, *op cit*, p 15.

<sup>2</sup> St Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, VI 9.

There is nothing out of keeping with our nature in this condition. Like all of God's requirements, it complies with the natural psychology of man as God Himself formed it, and it fits into what man is in the ordinary operation of his human nature. Whether in the natural or the supernatural sphere, any strong moving, whether it be of love, hate, wonder, fear, or whatever else it may be, produces for the time being a simplicity and fixity of idea, the whole attention being concentrated powerfully on the thing we love, hate, admire, or fear. A common incident will suffice to illustrate this. I turn the corner of the street, to come face to face with a dearly loved friend whom I have not seen for a long time, and who, I thought, was on the other side of the globe. For the moment reason is thrown into abeyance, ordinary mental routine is swept away by the sheer delight I experience at this happy and wholly unexpected meeting. The very incoherency of my exclamations of joy have little or no relation to reason, but are simply the spontaneous expression of my love and delight. Put God in the place of my friend, and we have something analogous to contemplation.

In respect to the ordinary interests of life, this condition not infrequently continues for long periods, the whole man finding satisfaction in that which he is contemplating, without restlessness or desire for change. Whether for evil or for good, such conditions affect the inner character profoundly, far more so than any corresponding reasonings on the same subject. And since love is the most potent of all the powers and influences which affect and sway the human spirit, it is readily understood that such contemplation of God, motivated by love, will mould a character in harmony with the divine object of our contemplation,

for love is, as we have thought, above all else, a unifying virtue. It unites us with that which we love.

But love is more than this. It is also a levelling virtue. This must, of necessity, be the case if it is a unifying virtue, for we are brought into some sort of condition of equality with that with which we become really united. We see this not infrequently in the influence of an unworthy love, how a fine-fibred soul is brought down to a baser level to its permanent hurt. But when God is involved, it is a process of levelling up. He cannot change, and so we are changed, made like unto Him, and because love makes us the partakers of the divine nature, it lifts us up to a new and Godlike plane of being.

But the work of love is not yet complete, for man becomes also happily subject to him whom he contemplates in love, for love is also a subjecting virtue. The surest and swiftest way of union with God, who is the subject of all our life and activity, is, therefore, to devote ourselves to a loving contemplation of Him, of His truth and His beauty, of His goodness and His love.

The supreme excellence of contemplation, therefore, lies in this very fact, that it is an exercise of pure love—the unitive virtue which alone can make the soul one with God. Love, which makes all things easy, must be the chief element in all prayer, of whatever kind, and as the apostle teaches us, it is the only permanent element—"love never faileth." We begin with love, and we can never get away from it. It is the essential support of the life of the spirit here on earth, it will be the essence of our life in heaven. It so governs and directs everything in the spiritual sphere that those who have philosophized most wisely,

about it declare that all the so-called virtues are but the varied expression of the one virtue of love "Love, joy, peace," is the "fruit of the Spirit" Note that the apostle says not the "fruits" of the Spirit, but the "fruit" Love, joy and peace are not three independent things to be co-ordinated, but they are inevitably successive phases in the progress of the soul in God, following upon each other, or rather growing out of each other, by the operation of a law of necessity Joy is love which has reached out for and secured the desired unity with the beloved, and found complete satisfaction in that unity Peace is constituted by this satisfaction. And this is the objective fruit which the Spirit will be able to produce in my life if I am yielding myself to His moulding

Some at this point may object that the work of prayer often brings not joy, but suffering, not peace, but conflict Those who raise this objection fail to realize that in the realm of the deeper realities there is no more incompatibility between joy and pain than there is between peace and struggle Indeed, where love is called upon to suffer for the beloved, joy is the natural product of the process If my love is real it rejoices in the suffering, it finds no satisfaction in a service which is easy and painless, feeling that such a service gives no opportunity for the expression which its nature demands We find the principle set forth in the saying of the little child to its mother—"Mother, let me do something for you, let me do something hard for you"

The supreme instance of this expression of love is found in the Passion of our Lord, which was the highest and completest expression of love ever known in the history of mankind "For the joy that was



set before Him He endured the cross " Love was the driving force behind the Passion " God so loved the world that He"—that is, the Holy Trinity, the Eternal Son loving and acting equally with the Father and the Holy Ghost—"gave His only begotten Son " And it was the prospect of being thus able to give Himself in love amid the torments of the Passion that filled His heart with joy. It was for this that He came; He looked forward to it with keen eagerness " How am I straitened," He cried, " until it be accomplished " His joy was the fruit of His love, as it will be of ours

If His Passion, then, was the highest exercise of love by the Perfect Man—love to His Father and love to His fellow-men—we are called upon to enter into that Passion, to participate in His great act of love, and the exercise of the prayer of contemplation, it being the prayer of pure love, is one of the chief ways in which He summons us to this participation It is a conspicuous fact in the history of contemplative souls through the ages that they have found the Passion of our Lord awaiting them as the chief theme of their contemplation Everyone who knows the history of the saints will recall how prevailing an element the Passion was in their work of contemplation We see it in St Francis, in St Catherine of Siena, in Mother Julian of Norwich, in St Bridget of Sweden, and in a host of others It is significant that the well-nigh universal rule is that when souls are led to the prayer of contemplation, they find themselves inevitably led to Calvary, that is to say, they are led to have a part in our Lord's supreme labour of love That Passion was His most excellent work because it was His highest act of love; and the excellence of

the work of contemplation to which He calls us lies in the fact that it, too, is a paramount work of love

In the higher walks of love many opportunities are to be found for suffering. In order to attain these heights and to maintain our place there, it is necessary to do great violence to ourselves, prone as we are to fall back to the lower paths, and in this violence we suffer. Profound readjustments are required, and these are not readily made. It might be compared to breaking the bone of a twisted limb in order to set it again.

When we hold ourselves in the presence of God, attentive and receptive, not trying to think any thoughts of our own, but trying definitely not to think them, not considering any images of the imagination, good as they may be in themselves, but actually hearkening, the ear of the soul attent, waiting with no element of impatience in our attitude—at such times it is that the channels of communication between God and the soul are wide open, and God Himself, as distinct from any mere intellectual knowledge or revelation concerning Himself, flows into us. “He is now dealing with the soul in the way of bestowing, and the soul must deal with Him by way of receiving, so that knowledge may be joined to knowledge, and love to love.”<sup>1</sup> The soul is now *patiens divina*, as the saying is, or a patient receiving or enduring divine things rather than *agens divina*, performing them. “Herein God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in perfection of love, without anything beyond its loving attention to God, listening to His voice, and admitting the light He sends.”<sup>2</sup> As Boussuet says, “The soul does little

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love*, p. 77

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, *Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. II, v. 1

and receives much, its work is delightful and most productive” Indeed, we may be as unconscious of the inflooding life of God as the little child at the font is unconscious at the moment of baptism of the grace that possesses it “The interior advantages,” says St John of the Cross, “which silent contemplation impresses on the soul, without the soul’s consciousness of them, are of inestimable value, for they are the most sweet and delicious unctions of the Holy Ghost, whereby He secretly fills the soul with the riches of His gifts and graces, for being God, He does His work as God”<sup>1</sup>

St John here uses the words “sweet and delicious” to imply, not any felt emotion of sweetness, but the objective quality of the blessings which are communicated Had he meant some mere feeling of sweetness, he could not have said that the soul was unconscious of them, or that they were communicated secretly. What is communicated is the quality of sweetness which is an attribute of God, as the psalmist said, “O taste and see how sweet the Lord is” And we are to remember that all attributes of God belong integrally to the divine essence What mode of prayer can be more excellent than that which so surely communicates to the soul these high and objective qualities of the essence of the Godhead Itself?

What will be the supreme consequence of the exercise of this love which thus expresses itself in contemplative prayer? The theology of it, or the philosophy of it, or whatever else we may choose to call it, is simple The love of God pervades the moral universe, and by the love of God we mean the essence of the Being of God, who is essentially love, for, as St Augustine

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, pp. 80-81

declares, "What God has, that He is, *Quod habet, hoc est*"<sup>1</sup> Every moral being in God's universe is plunged in the depths of this ocean of love. It is all around and about us. If it is not within us, it is through our own fault. Man's will is free. He possesses the awful power of shutting God out from his life, like a watertight vessel plunged fathoms deep in the sea. But let that vessel open ever so slight a door, and instantly the waters of the sea flood in. So is it with the soul of man. Let the heart be opened ever so little, and God, surrounding it with the infinite pressure of His love, flows into it.

Grave masters of our holy religion tell us that the divine eagerness to communicate Himself to His creatures is so great that where it is made at all possible by the opening of the heart, God immediately, and in the fullest measure that the creature's receptivity will permit, communicates Himself to the soul. "The soul shows its love, and calls to its Beloved. But God, whose eyes are on the just, and His ears open to their prayers, waits not till they have finished their loving acts, but breaking in upon them in the midst of their prayer, quickly pours Himself in, meeting the soul, anointing it with the sweetness of heavenly dew, wonderfully strengthening, vivifying, inebriating it, and in this contemplation, its carnal nature is so absorbed that it becomes, as it were, wholly spiritual."<sup>2</sup>

We have said that God will pour Himself into the waiting soul to the full measure of the soul's capacity. But what is this measure? St. John of the Cross gives us a glowing answer that in the measure in which the soul, on fire with divine love, is stripped of the

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *de Civitate Dei*, XI 10

<sup>2</sup> Guigo the Carthusian, *Scala Claustrium*, ch. v

natural element, the divine element is diffused in her normally, and supernaturally, "in order that there may be no vacuum in its nature,"<sup>1</sup> for spiritual nature as well as physical nature abhors a vacuum.

The capacity of the soul for thus receiving God is not infinite, for there is but one Infinite, which is God Himself. But the capacity is limitless, and as we hold our hearts in quiet, loving contemplation, He flows into our inmost being, all that He is and all that He has, so far as the finite soul, with its natural limitations as a creature, and its sub-natural limitations from the effects of sin, is able to receive Him. He fills the soul with His infinite purity, His infinite love, His wisdom and power. Nothing is required on our part for this work save the consecration of the will; and the more sincere and persistent the consecration, the more fully will God be able to enter in and possess us. The work we are called upon to do is a work of loving attention to Him. It is not a passive state in the ordinary sense of the expression, for this attention, in order that it be secured and preserved, requires the most powerful, persistent and often painful activity of the will. It is a strenuous work and a long work, this holding the soul at attention, and waiting upon God, but in it the soul is acted upon rather than acting, and God takes it and makes it one with Himself, and, therefore, like unto Himself. So long as we hold fast to His grace, and permit no neutralizing evil thing to enter, the growth in the likeness of God, and in the participation of His nature, deepens and increases through all time. This increase results from the working of the Being of God within us in the ceaseless activity of His own nature, and is not de-

<sup>1</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, ch. xv. 4.

pendent on our conscious activity Whether I sleep or wake, if my heart be open to Him, He unceasingly communicates Himself to me, searching out more and more the innermost recesses of my being, in order that there may be nothing in me which He may not wholly possess. If we, by the use of His grace, keep our hearts warm with love towards Him, nothing will be able to interfere with this ceaseless and ever-deepening participation of my soul in Him This increase here will be the assurance of the continuance of increase throughout eternity

Such is the glory and the joy of the faithful in this life, and in the endless life of the world to come They will ever grow and increase, for there can be nothing static about this life of God of which we partake. Should we for a moment stand still, in that moment life would begin to perish The essential thing in life is growth, progress When growth ceases, stagnation and death begin But where God dwells there can be no such cessation Because He is infinite and ceaseless activity, ceaselessly and infinitely does He work to make us one with Himself, He dwelling in us and we in Him

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## CHAPTER XVII

### CONTEMPLATION AND THE UNITIVE WAY

WE must extend our study of the excellence of contemplation by considering that this mode of prayer, well and faithfully exercised, leads the soul along the unitive way, just as affective prayer constitutes the exercises of the illuminative way

The unitive way, the mystical way, the way of perfection, and contemplation are, in the judgment of many of the masters, to be regarded as the same state of soul. Let us remind ourselves again that none of these includes extraordinary mystical experiences. Those experiences belong to another condition, although they take place in the unitive way, for we must remember that while the unitive way must have its beginnings in each soul on earth, it finds its fullness only in the beatific life of heaven

Many definitions are to be found of the unitive way and of the exercises proper to it. Father Divine explains it as "the state of those who have overcome their passions, and brought them under subjection, and whose souls are so devoted to the practice of virtue as to be prompt and perfect in the exercise of charity by loving God habitually, and by frequent, prompt, and efficacious acts of that divine charity. This is the state of perfection attainable in this life, and always capable of increase. It is called the unitive way because by love the soul is united to God, and the more

perfect the charity, the closer and more intimate is this union, and union with God is the principal study and endeavour of this grade " <sup>1</sup>

A definition given by Benedict XIV is to be commended as especially sane, and as happily wanting in that element of poetic glow which so often obscures the descriptions of the higher ways of the Spirit given by certain authors. He says, "The unitive way includes those who are in the state of the perfect, who have their mind so drawn away from all temporal things that they enjoy great peace, and are neither agitated by various desires nor moved by any great extent of passion, but have their minds chiefly fixed on God, and their attention turned always, or very frequently, to Him. To these belongs the unitive way which is chiefly employed in union with God by love, by the actual experience and exercise of it " <sup>2</sup>

These definitions, simple as they are, will confuse us unless we recall and keep in mind the definition of perfection we have already quoted from St Thomas. "The perfect" are not those who have attained to spiritual fullness, but those who have entered upon the way, and are diligently using the appointed means necessary to that final attainment.

It will be seen from these definitions that he who makes an earnest act of love is engaging in an exercise of the unitive way, for, as we have seen, love is a unitive virtue, and every act of love is an act of union of the soul with God. Contemplation consists in the immediate exercise of love (that is, the exercise which is directed straight to God, without the interposing

<sup>1</sup> A Devine, *Manual of Ascetical Theology*, p. 466

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XIV, *Heroic Virtue*, VI, No. 5 (quoted by Devine, *op. cit.*, p. 295)



medium of reasoning and imagination), and realizing this, we see that contemplation and the unitive way are one and the same thing. They are constituted by the exercise of love. Love is the only virtue that abides for ever—"love never faileth." Knowledge and love are most closely allied, but for this very reason they must be carefully distinguished. "We can have more love for God than we can have knowledge of Him," says St Francis<sup>1</sup>. Here again we must recall the sharp distinction between knowing God and knowing about God. The latter may be only an intellectual grasp of certain ascertained facts. The former is an experiencing of God, an entering into the very life of God Himself, and the only way of entrance is the way of love. Along this way those may run with swift steps who have little theological information, and no mental apparatus or training which would enable them effectively to deal with a theological proposition. But even simple and ignorant souls possess a limitless power of knowing God in the profound intimacy of love as Father, as Saviour, and as loving Teacher and Guide. They can, it may be, explain not one article of the creeds, but they can perceive the necessary conclusions with a luminous grasp which makes God and His truth an intense, living, and practically governing factor in every relation of life. The dominance of such love constitutes the unitive way, and the exercise of love is contemplation.

The consideration of the nature of the unitive way shows that those who are engaged in the ordinary occupations of everyday activity in the world are able to walk in this path, and it is equally clear that a literal and continuous consciousness of this state of union is

<sup>1</sup> St Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, VI 4

not necessary. A moral continuance is all that can be looked for. If the loving acts of union with God are frequent, this is sufficient.

It will be observed further that the unitive way is not to be regarded as a species of spiritual life and activity distinct from the purgative and illuminative ways. These three ways continually overlap. Acts of purgation and acts of union with God may follow each other in swift succession. The same act may be one of purgation and at the same time one of union with God. Indeed, we find that this is often the case in the common routine of the spiritual life. For example, every confession I make is an act of purgation, the absolution I receive is a letting in of the light of God's pardon, and my work of reparation for my sins may easily be exercises of the unitive way. Again, my preparation for Holy Communion is in large part an exercise of the purgative way, but a good communion is the supremest act of the unitive life of which the soul is capable in this world; and the permanent grace of Communion is a grace of union with the Godhead through the Incarnate Son whom I receive in that act.

Father Baker shows us that in our meditations also there may be frequent operations of the soul which will partake of the characteristics of the three ways. "It may happen," he says, "that a soul, being as yet in the most imperfect purgative way, may in some fits be so abundantly supplied with grace as that during the exercise of meditation she may oft be enabled to produce immediate acts of the will, yea, and perhaps aspirations too, so joining together exercises both purgative, illuminative and unitive in one recollection; yea, it may be possible for such an imperfect beginner

to spend the whole time of a recollection in these nobler exercises " <sup>1</sup>

We find this overlapping illustrated in the Carthusian Spiritual Exercises of Abbot John Michael of Coutances. In his devotions appointed especially for the unitive way, he includes prayers beginning, *Purga, Purifica, Munda*, Purge, Purify, Wash, and also bids us pray for "cleansing and preservation from the darkness of faults, ignorance and error," all of which expressions ordinarily would seem to belong to the purgative way, and to be remote from the unitive. But they only show that unless the soul is constantly going back to the work of purgation and illumination, it will not be able to maintain its union with God.

It is at this juncture in the progress of prayer that the soul begins to realize that it is being acted upon rather than acting. St Francis de Sales, in explaining it, speaks of a certain loving consciousness or recollection of God, which, he says, "we do not make by our own choice, for it is not in our power to have it at will, nor does it depend on our industry, but God gives it to us when He wills" <sup>2</sup>

Father Baker describes how the soul in the unitive way, its gaze set upon God, and "endeavouring to contemplate God in the darkness and obscurity of a blind and naked faith, void of all distinct and express images, will little by little grow so well disposed to Him that she will have less need of forcing herself to produce good affections to Him, or of prescribing to herself determinate forms of acts and affections; on the contrary, divine love will become so firmly established in the soul, so wholly and only filling and

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, pp. 404-5

<sup>2</sup> St Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, Bk. VI 7

possessing it, that it will become, as it were, a new soul unto the soul, as constantly breathing forth fervourous acts of love, and as naturally almost as the lungs do send forth breath. And here," continues the master, "begins the state of pure contemplation, the objective of all the exercises of an internal life. . . . And this is truly and properly that which mystics do style the unitive way, because herein the soul is in a continual union in spirit with God, having transcended all creatures and herself too, which are become, as it were, annihilated, and God is all in all" <sup>1</sup>

In this gazing, one may look out only into impenetrable darkness, but this will be recognized as normal in this kind of prayer. Indeed, it is essential, for the soul, not yet having the vision of God, has eliminated all images of creatures. Therefore, what it sees must be a blank, there is no alternative. And this darkness will be greeted with joy for it is a sign that we have succeeded in driving out all that is not God. We make our acts of faith, and go on into this dark night of the soul, certain that He is with us though we perceive Him not.

But this does not last always. Out of the darkness comes light, or, rather, light in the darkness. The darkness itself, while remaining darkness, is transformed into that "luminous darkness" which ever enlightens those who persevere in this search after God. We do not seek to emerge from the darkness, we press on Godwards, and carry it with us joyously. Let the soul persevere in its gaze upon Him, and this blessed issue will be inevitable. "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>, Father Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, pp 400-1

<sup>2</sup> Hab 11 3

Father Baker insists that "there is no state of spirituality beyond this," but we are not to think that this state exists in one degree only. It is, indeed, the first steps towards that heavenly state in which the blessed ones will rejoice for all eternity, but within this state there may be as many degrees as there are souls striving after God. "This state may infinitely increase in degrees of purity, the operations of the soul growing more and more spiritual in time, and divine without all limitation." But we are not to be without labour and suffering in this work of ascending the ladder of the interior life. "Now it is that God provides for souls, dearly beloved by Him, trials and desolations incomprehensible to the inexperienced, leading them from light to darkness, and thence to light again; in all which changes the soul keeps herself in the same equality and tranquillity, as knowing that by them she approaches nearer and nearer to God, plunging herself more and more profoundly in Him . . . In a word, it is not she that now lives, but Christ and His Holy Spirit that lives, reigns, and operates in her."<sup>1</sup>

In considering this spiritual ascent we are to remember that it is the *degree* of grace we attain, not the *kind* of grace that is given, which counts. A humble resolute perseverance in a definitely 'lower form of prayer is much more pleasing to God, and therefore more productive of grace, than a higher form prosecuted with less resolution and devotion—if indeed such higher form can have any existence at all where there is such a lack of earnestness and consecration. No matter what kind of grace God gives us (and by this we mean whether it be the grace common to all Christians, or some rare and extraordinary favour),

<sup>1</sup> Father Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 402.

what really matters is how we respond; for without our response there is no deepening or developing of the power of grace, indeed not to respond is speedily to lose the precious gift.

It is often thought by those uninstructed in the ways of God with the souls of men that it is required in the unitive way that one withdraw himself from the ordinary occupations of men, retiring to some solitude where he can with unbroken continuity practise the contemplation to which God seems to call him. We have already seen that nothing is farther from the truth, and this finds its proof both in the history of the common spirituality through the ages, and in the reasoned study of the true theory of prayer. The unitive way is not incompatible with the transaction of the ordinary duties of our place in life. We may be called upon to carry on our business affairs, our study, our conversation, but these constitute no interruption of the deep current in our souls.

More than this, the exercise of prayer in the unitive way is the consequence of the operation of a habit the nature of which is shown to have its root in ordinary human psychology. Father Baker makes this plain, comparing it to one who at the beginning of his musical education must pay the closest conscious attention to every string, every stop, every movement of the fingers. After a time, however, when proficiency has been acquired, he is able "to play on an instrument not only in the dark, but even whilst he is conversing with another, by reason that the images are become so pure and universal that the person using them perceives them not, neither knows by what he is directed" <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Father Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 404.

In spite of these assurances of the masters of the spiritual life, there are many who, having in mind the accounts they have read of certain contemplatives who have spent many hours daily, rapt in prayer, are daunted at the thought of having to follow such great spiritual warriors; but they may as reasonably be daunted at the thought of saying any prayers at all. In every department of prayer the saints have gone far beyond anything we dare undertake. Their examples are to be admired and revered, but not to be emulated necessarily. This would be presumption. We are to do what lies in us to remove all obstacles to progress, and commit ourselves to God's guidance without seeking to set any pace for ourselves. He will bear us along as He wills. It is ours to lay aside every weight. The Abbé Saudreau states a commonplace, but a very exalted one, when he says that "God does not usually accord gifts so precious save to persons already advanced in the way of detachment."<sup>1</sup> But where is the soul who is really in earnest in its search after God who will draw back from the discipline necessary to that spirit of detachment? He who would shrink is in the peril of those to whom St Augustine sounded his warning, "Say, Enough, and you are lost, always increase, always make progress, always go forward, stop not in the way, turn not back, turn not aside"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saudreau, *The Mystical State*, p. 131

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine, *Sermon CLXIX*

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SOME DIFFICULTIES AND ENCOURAGEMENTS

THE difficulties which attend the exercise of contemplative prayer are not markedly different from those which are found in any serious work of prayer; but since contemplation is a more intensified form of prayer, we must expect to find the difficulties correspondingly intensified.

Human infirmity, unfortunately, is always present, and has to be taken account of. The most earnest and loving soul will find its energies flagging after a time. How are we to deal with this and kindred difficulties? When the will tends to weariness, and attention threatens to lag, three correctives might be employed. First, there must be an exercise of courage. We are not to yield too readily to spiritual fatigue. The will must be aroused to greater energy, and we must not be too readily influenced by its protestations that it has done all that can be expected of it. Like a lazy and stubborn beast, mind and body often need to be flogged to their task. To give way may mean not only the loss of the spirit of prayer, but to do so may be to deny ourselves the opportunity of learning the lesson of perseverance, and the resultant blessing and joy of staying the mind on God. One who gives way too easily under pressure will never learn to cultivate the spirit of endurance. We have seen that special assistance is rendered by the operation



of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit to the soul in the work of contemplation, and it is at this point that the Gift of Fortitude comes into play, enabling us to endure the hardness of the effort at perseverance

But it is not always that this course of enforced prayer is to be adopted. Often the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, and we have to learn to exercise some judicious degree of mercy on ourselves. So we come to a second remedy, that of resting from the exercises for a brief space. Stop the effort for recollection for a few minutes, or it may be that it would be well to suspend it sometimes for several days. But this should never be done save with the intention of returning resolutely to the work. Sometimes the interval, where we stop for a few minutes, might be used for complete relaxation of mind and body, or we might employ it in simple vocal prayers, or in brief meditation. But return we must with renewed energy, and strong acts of the will. This intermission should be like the case of a man carrying a heavy load who lays it down for a short time in order to relieve the strain on wind and muscle. He does not lay it down in order to be rid of it, but, on the contrary, that he may, after a brief rest, carry it the more effectively. We do not suspend our work of contemplation in order that we may be done with it, but that we may pray with greater force and zeal, and meet the assaults against the spirit of prayer with increasing courage and resilience. In this way we can best "establish the exact equilibrium between the exertion prompted by generosity and the need of the soul for rest."<sup>1</sup>

One thing, however, is of paramount importance

<sup>1</sup> Alvarez de Paz, quoted by Père Plus in *How to Pray Always*, p. 73

Never, under any circumstances, suspend your prayer in a spirit of mere weak surrender. When you have come to what seems the end of your capacity for the time being, stop indeed, and without scruple or hesitation, but stop with an offering to God of the decision to rest a space. Let the cessation of your prayer be as definite and conscious an act for His glory as was its beginning. One who weakly throws up his hands and says, "I can do no more; I will let it go for this time," is yielding to a spirit of sloth or discouragement, and the fact that as a matter of common sense and discretion he ought to suspend his efforts does not save him from blame, for he is doing a wise and good thing for an unwise and selfish reason.

A third remedy for this weariness which may well be applied at times is to change the expression of the devotion, going back over the acts freely, as the Spirit may seem to suggest. Such vocal prayers persisted in, and given a renewed force by reasonable variety, so far from being inconsistent with the spirit of contemplation, supply it with wings and impart to it a new impulse in its upward flight.

Consideration must be given to distraction, that universal foe of prayer. In the first place, let us understand that we are not to be dismayed because of it. It is quite inevitable, and we shall save ourselves much trouble if we make up our minds to this in the beginning. When St. Francis de Sales was asked how to escape from these distractions, with his quaint humour he replied, "Die and be saved." Nor would it be good for us to be too easily rid of it. One of St. Teresa's earnest prayers was that God would not be too easy with her by removing, because of her weakness and frequent failures, such difficulties. She knew the peril

of an easy spiritual course. Never in this world can we expect to be wholly free from distraction. Such freedom is one of the privileges of the Blessed in the world to come. It is not to be enjoyed here, and instead of its being thought of as a hardship or misfortune, rather should its presence be regarded as one of the privileges of our service of God in our earthly pilgrimage; for the very distraction which would seem to mar our prayer is the opportunity to wage a battle, sometimes even a long and glorious campaign, for the honour of God. It brings out the best fighting qualities of the good soldier of Christ. But it is not we who fight, but Christ who fights within us. He enters into us and makes our hearts the arena of the struggle. He asks for the use of our faculties, and that we co-operate with Him as He employs them as the instruments of His warfare. Through us He wins the victory and having won it, He credits it to us in the records of the wars of the Lord, and gives us the crown of reward. Without the battle there is no victory, without the victory there is no honour done to Him, without honouring Him we can have no crown.

Let us remind ourselves of some familiar principles which apply to distraction in any and all prayer before we consider the subject in relation to contemplative prayer in particular. First, we must not forget that there is never any sin in involuntary distraction. We suddenly realize that the attention has wandered far afield, but this wandering, in an earnest soul, is the result of infirmity rather than of fault. There is no sin unless when we realize the distraction, we deliberately go on with the distracting thought. The remedy is the same that we use when we discover, in the course of any ordinary study, that the attention

has gone astray By an act of the will we withdraw the attention from that upon which it has fastened itself, and deliberately set it again upon the thing we have in hand St Francis de Sales, writing to one of his spiritual children, gives this counsel in his own wise way "If your heart wanders or is distracted," he says, "bring it back to the point quite gently, and replace it tenderly in its Master's presence, and even if you did nothing during the whole of your hour but bring your heart back and place it again in our Lord's presence, though it went astray every time you brought it back, your hour would be very well employed, and would be an exercise pleasing to your Bridegroom" <sup>1</sup>

But there are other aspects of this subject. First, the natural man, if he has been intellectually trained, loves study, investigation, the pursuit of natural truth There are perhaps no exercises in the natural world for those who have attained facility in them more delightful than those of the intellect For this reason it is easier to concentrate, and to remain concentrated, on natural truths than on supernatural things for which we may have naturally little taste and no training

In the second place, we are to remember that there is a highly organized and efficient power in the world which is engaged continually in trying by every means which experience can suggest or ingenuity devise to draw us away from spiritual pursuits The devil and his minions have no interest in seeking to detach our minds from a study of Greek or mathematics, but he is tremendously interested in distracting us in every possible way the moment he sees us trying to pray Suppose every time you tried to study, a very persuasive person appeared at your elbow, and in a persistent and

<sup>1</sup> St. Francis de Sales, Letter to Louis Ballou, June 1617

alluring way tried to distract you, telling you of all manner of things which he thought would prove attractive to you. Suppose, no matter how hard you tried to get away from him, he followed you everywhere, ever present, tireless in his work of persuasion and full of a subtle charm; and that you knew that there was no hope of ever getting rid of him as long as you lived. I think you would not find it altogether easy to keep your mind applied to the subject you were studying. After a while, by long resistance, you might get to the point of being able to do some real study in spite of this extraordinary distraction, but it would be pain and grief to you. You might even cause your tormentor to grow discouraged for a season and cease his persecutions, but it would be anything but tranquillizing to the mind to know that he was standing but a little distance away, watching you all the while, and that he would surely come back to tease and disturb you again the moment he thought he saw the least chance of success; and all the time his viciousness such that if he could not make you do his will he would delight to make you suffer; or, to use St Francis's witticism, if he cannot make you lose eternity, he tries to make you lose time.

This is what is going on continually with everyone who is making any earnest effort to acquire concentration in prayer. The whole thing is so subtle that it is difficult to realize that it comes from without. This evil tempter who dogs our steps attacks us so interiorly, he has the facility for so insinuating himself into our very soul, as it were, that it might be described as a twisting and turning of the mind itself.

Indeed, so truly does all this seem to arise from within ourselves that many are persuaded that it is so,

and in despair they give up praying. Of course this is just what the tempter wants. The only psychological and spiritual safety is to tell yourself continually and with great emphasis that it is the devil, and not self, who is making the trouble.

Further, we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that this distraction will often totally prevent any attentive, centred work of prayer. But it cannot keep us from trying to pray, or from continuing to try, and this is just as pleasing to God as the calmest, most uninterrupted prayer. Indeed it is, perhaps, more pleasing to Him, for if all were sweet and pleasant there would be little credit in keeping at it, whereas the sticking to a hard and painful course, because we want to please God, although we seem to be getting nowhere with it, cannot fail to bring us many graces of union with Him.

At this point the comparison between the application of the mind in study and in prayer fails. No matter what your effort may be, unless you succeed in actually banishing the distraction in study, you will never become a scholar. But in prayer, the distraction, when rightly met, is the very thing that will make you a saint.

Of course there is much of distraction in the prayer of sinners like ourselves for which the tempter is not responsible. In many instances it is our own fault. Every sin we commit, every distraction we wilfully allow, makes it more difficult the next time to concentrate in prayer, and we thus by our culpable failures pile up trouble for ourselves in the future. We create a distracted habit of mind, and the mind works, as we have seen, according as it has been trained. We cannot, therefore, attribute everything to the agency

of the tempter. Men are often like a machine which will run without being watched. At Holy Cross we have a motor down by the river which pumps the water supply up to the monastery. All we have to do is to throw a little switch in the cellar, and away the motor goes, and runs itself until the switch is pushed the other way. In many cases the tempter has only to push the switch, and we do all the work quite to his satisfaction.

The case with the saints is quite different. They were terribly assaulted, and Satan entrusts the warfare against them to none save his ablest and most experienced lieutenants. Any little fourth-rate devil can keep us busy. The temptations of saints like St. Anthony, for example, seem to us, as we read of them, to be grotesquely impossible and ridiculous, but we must beware of thinking of them lightly. We have never experienced any such temptations because we yield so readily that no such methods are needed to overthrow us. We have not the slightest idea of the awful extremities to which Satan can and will go when he is seeking to draw a really holy soul away from God. But neither saint nor sinner can fail save in one way, and that is by saying Yes to the temptation to distraction. Nor is there any drawn battle in this warfare. To say No is to gain a victory; and to keep on saying No is a continuous victory.

The difficulties which beset us in lower forms of prayer we must expect to find in greater and more painful degree in contemplation, and for this there is a natural, psychological reason. The fewer of my faculties I employ in a work, the more easily am I distracted. If I sit down to think upon some topic, and do nothing but think, the attention easily wanders.

If I assist my thinking by reading on the subject, I can hold my attention much more easily; and if I write down my thoughts as they develop, or speak them to another person, it is almost an impossibility for distraction to overcome me if I have a mind that is at all balanced and normal

But, as we have seen, in contemplation few media or instruments of prayer are used. The approach to God is very direct. We are not even assisted by an organized framework of logical thought as in a properly prepared meditation. None of these helps is present, and Father Baker warns the soul which is "incapable of meditation and unable likewise to read" (this last condition indicates the kind of folk he encouraged to aspire to contemplation), that if it seeks this higher devotion, it "must be prepared not to be daunted with aridities and distractions, which distractions she has no other way to resist or expel, but only by pure obstinacy of the will not to attend to them or care for them" <sup>1</sup>

All our teachers through the ages insist on this difficulty, and all agree that distraction is an inescapable adjunct to contemplation. St. Gregory repeats the warning again and again. "We can remain fixed in the active life," he says, "but in the contemplative we are by no means able to keep our minds continually on the stretch" <sup>2</sup>. The Abbot Butler affords us much comfort by the way in which he describes the difficulties of the work of keeping one's loving attention upon God. This attention, he says, "lasts a few minutes, then fades away, and either a blank or distractions supervene; when recognized, the will again fixes the mind

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 409

, <sup>2</sup> St Gregory Mag, *In Ezek*, I v. 12, *Moralia*, x 31



in 'loving attention' for a time The period of prayer is thus passed in such alternations, a few minutes each, the bouts of loving attention being, in favourable conditions, more prolonged than the bouts of distraction" <sup>1</sup> Thus, says St Gregory, are contemplative souls continually "soaring up and sinking down while they ever unceasingly endeavour to behold the highest objects, and are thrown back on themselves by the weight of their corruptible nature" <sup>2</sup>

We may sum up this argument with the statement that if in the will (the feeling does not matter) we maintain a steadfast love of, and consequent desire for, the vision of God in contemplation; and if we resolutely renew our acts of contemplation, we are then living the contemplative life There will be lapses such as St Gregory shows us are inevitable, and perfection in contemplation can never be had this side of heaven, but we should not grow discouraged and count ourselves as faithless or unstable because of such lapses

In spite of the warfare within, resolute and courageous souls find that contemplative prayer will produce a rare quality of interior tranquillity and peace St Gregory says of it, "The sweetness of contemplation is worthy of love exceedingly, for it raises the soul above herself, opens out things divine, shows her how to despise earthly things; and reveals to the eyes of the mind the things of the spirit" <sup>3</sup> Bossuet speaks of it as "a gentle contemplation in which the soul is sustained in peace" Père Poulain adds that this form of prayer becomes "an affectionate

<sup>1</sup> Butler *Western Mysticism*, "Afterthoughts," in 2nd ed, p xlix

<sup>2</sup> St Gregory, *Moralia*, Bk XXXI 49

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, *In Ezech*, Bk II, Hom 11 13

remembrance of God," in the maintaining of which "the soul feels a sacred flame which burns on gently within her, and takes the place of reasonings"; and St John of the Cross describes it in glowing language as "an unction of loving knowledge, most delicate, serene, peaceful, lonely, strange to sense and imagination" <sup>1</sup>

The presence of this tranquil quality does not, however, mean that contemplative prayer is not a very active part of the warfare of the soul. But it does mean that in contemplation the soul is enabled to enter, as in no other exercise, into the deep peace of God which passeth all understanding. Warfare there will be, distractions and fightings, but all the while the soul is lifted up above the clamour. She erects, by co-operation with the Holy Ghost, the protective mechanism of faith, hope and love, behind which she abides in the fullness of the calm of the divine presence. She lets the adversary thunder at the gates as he will, but, certain of her security in God, as St Francis de Sales enjoins, she does not so much as look out to see who is there. She has more important, more engrossing work to do, and none of these things disturbs her calm of love. She wounds the pride of her satanic foe by ignoring his assaults, and she will not allow him who seeks to make her lose eternity to cause her to lose even one moment of her precious time.

<sup>1</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, p. 81

## CHAPTER XIX

### SOME POINTS OF TECHNIQUE

ONE shrinks from attempting to outline a technique of prayer of any kind, and it seems almost an irreverence to suggest a technique for these higher forms of prayer of which we have been thinking. We have already remarked that the Holy Spirit deals with no two souls alike, and we have heard Father Baker's disapproval of even the spiritual experts who assume that their own experience in prayer is that which all aspiring souls are to meet. But a technique there is, although it may require a different adjustment to every soul. All that is meant by the term is exact and approved method.

We cannot deal with any aspect of prayer without remembering that man is made up of body as well as soul. "Glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's"<sup>1</sup> It is a twofold service. We worship Him with our whole being. Not the soul only, but the body and all its capacities, are to be drafted and made to contribute their part to our work of prayer.

We hear much in our time of the effect of mind on matter, but we think far less than we should of the effect of matter on mind. The condition of the body affects the whole interior man far more than we are

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 20.

inclined to give it credit for Mind and soul find it difficult, sometimes impossible, to function well in a body which is tired or ill. In worldly occupation or study we readily take account of the condition of the body, in prayer it is too little reckoned with. We should keep in mind that ordinarily we should bring to our prayers the best bodily conditions possible. For example, deliberately to wait for our prayers until an hour of the day when we know quite well that we shall be fatigued in body and mind is to invite defeat, and it is scarcely a common-sense course if we are to approach God with honour to Him and profit to ourselves. The deeply ingrained notion that there is special value in prayers said at special hours has its basis in truth, but it is often carried so far as to degenerate almost into a superstition. There is psychological value of an objective kind in literally beginning the day with God, and in commending oneself to Him at its close. But to put off one's prayers until the last tired minutes before going to sleep is neither wise nor reverent. There are those, of course, who suffer from ill-health, and cannot therefore choose their times as they might if they were well and strong, but a little care in observing would enable everyone to decide what times and circumstances, what bodily conditions, conduce most effectively to concentrated prayer.

To consult the general bodily conditions is not enough, however. There are particular reactions between body and mind which need to be studied, and an understanding of them will greatly enhance our power to pray effectively. Certain bodily attitudes, for example, contribute directly to mental sloth, while others bring the mind to a swift attention. The mind, indeed the whole interior man, functions through a

part of the material body, the brain Let the body sag and relax under improper conditions, and the effect upon the brain is such that deep, intensive application often becomes difficult, if not impossible Let the body come to alert attention, and all the interior processes are quickened These reactions are particularly marked when, from whatever cause, the attention begins to flag Those who have attempted the exercises of contemplative prayer are familiar with these processes. I set my mind upon God, and perhaps for a little while I am able to gaze upon Him with steadfast, loving attention Then comes a period of blankness, everything goes, even if I can keep my thoughts from running upon any particular subject, the mind is no longer directly on God, and distracting images speedily intrude themselves I rally my attention again, and again I go through the same baffling course Then, perhaps, I realize that my attitude of body is a negligent, if not an indolent and indulgent one I am not taking account of the influence of body on mind, I am forgetting that the spirit cannot function adequately in a slothful body But I arouse myself swiftly I bring myself instantly to an upright position I kneel erect, clasping my hands before my breast; or, if I am using a book, I hold it with deliberate care before me Above all, I keep a stern custody over my eyes I either keep them closed, or steadily to the front, looking with resolute gaze upon the crucifix, or upon some other sacred representation which will bring to the mind the thought of God There is one law to which there is no exception: the attention can never be concentrated so long as the eyes are wandering idly from object to object In short, like a soldier, I come to attention in the

presence of my Commander-in-Chief Those who have practised these methods will testify that the effect is sometimes almost electric

This does not mean, however, that the body is to be kept in a state of tension Such tension would in a short time produce a weariness and possibly a collapse which would work great hurt The ideal is, of course, to pray without a sense of strain, but to do anything with ease and spontaneity requires the existence of a habit This is why we have in a former chapter said so much about the formation of habits of prayer In the beginning we must perform our acts with strong purpose and resolution, but habit installs in the place of this conscious, and sometimes grim, resolve, the sustaining inspiration of divine love There is a relaxation which is to be desired, the relaxation, the letting oneself go, which comes from a sense of the certainty of the sustaining love and power of God But so long as we are in this life, we have to keep a strict guard against mental and physical sluggishness, and these can often be put to flight for the full period of our prayer-time through the operation of such physical influences as we have been considering

These methods are offered as suggestions They have proved of benefit to many, but each soul must test them for itself For example, the kneeling posture is generally regarded amongst us as the normal one for prayer, but some find standing, or sitting, more conducive to the mental ease and activity that is required Father Baker says of his own practices—in his *Confessions* he writes always in the third person—“The situation of his body in the time of his exercise was as various as kneeling, sitting, walking, and lying down He ever accommodated his body to the state

of the spirit ”<sup>1</sup> When one attitude of the body wearies us, or no longer acts to stimulate attention, we try another But it is rare that anyone can pray for any considerable length of time effectively if he disregards the influences of the physical nature Each soul must observe and study its own natural reactions, and deploy them as skilfully as it can, in order that they may contribute to, and not diminish from, the perfection of his prayer.

This brings us to the question of the actual length of time during which one can wisely seek to engage in contemplative prayer. Few souls are able, even after long practice, to spend very extended periods in contemplation without grave distraction Both natural and supernatural powers have gradually to be built up. We begin with a brief space, five minutes or even less out of our ordinary period set apart for exercises of prayer being devoted to fixing, as far as we can, the inner gaze on God After a few days we may add to it, and again, later, we may urge the soul to occupy itself during a still longer period It is little by little that the powers of prayer are developed and cultivated, and if we are faithful in our efforts, it may please God to give us the ability to devote much time to these priceless exercises

Just how long should these periods be made eventually? No precise rule can be laid down in general. It will be as God may call us, and He may have a different direction for each individual. So exacting a master as Father Baker, writing for enclosed Religious who are supposed to be contemplatives by profession, is content with one, or at most two half-hours daily, whatever further time be given to other

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Confessions*, p 105

interior, spiritual exercises; and he accords the name of contemplatives to those who are able to give this length of time to affective and contemplative prayer, however much it may be distracted, provided the distractions be not deliberately yielded to. In his *Confessions* he gives the history of his personal experience. Shortly after he was called to the prayer of aspiration, he increased his periods of contemplation to as much as five or six hours each day, sometimes extending it to the space of eleven hours. Later, after the mystical experience which he speaks of as his "second conversion," he was led to reduce the time greatly, giving scarcely an hour a day to contemplation, the greater part of which time was coincident with celebrating Mass, which he tells us he "performed aspiratively."<sup>1</sup> At the same time he acquired "a stability in prayer," by which he seems to mean so deep-laid a habit that if he was interrupted in his contemplation, and was not able to make it for several days, when he began again, there was no difficulty whatever in resuming it instantly in its full current and power.<sup>2</sup>

We have already spoken of the materials of contemplative prayer—the forms of affective prayer, the aspirations, and by no means least of all, the forms of vocal prayer which the saints in all ages have employed to give vertebræ, as it were, to their contemplations. All these constitute a part of the technique of the higher modes of prayer. How far one or another detail will suit one or another soul can be determined only by the experiments each soul must make for itself under the guidance of the Spirit. The wise and humble course is to begin with the method and the

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Confessions*, pp. 106, 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121



materials which have proved of practical help to others, and especially with those which through many centuries have been consecrated by the use of the great masters of the art of prayer. No one can tell whether a garment will fit him until he tries it on. The trial made, he will know what changes and readjustments are required, or whether it should be laid aside and another chosen in its place. The illustration fails, however, in one respect. We do not adjust our bodies to our clothes, but we do, in many cases, adjust our souls to our devotions, which might be called the external clothing of our prayer.

We have all had the experience of meeting with some highly commended and much-used devotion, and trying to use it only to find that it seemed to hinder rather than to help. But we did not become discouraged. Mindful of the great help it had been to others, we kept on with it, and were rewarded by realizing after a time that it offered so perfect a medium for the expression of our heart's love that we wondered how it could have irked us, or how we ever got on without it. It proved to be like the harness to the beast of burden, galling at first, but its use once learned, it was found to be that alone which enabled it to draw the load.

On the other hand, it may be quite true that what has helped others may not help us. Often modifications and adjustment are necessary, and there should be no scruple about making the change if it seems wise after a good, honest trial of what has proved good for others. Change in itself is not ill-advised if it be not the result of instability or spiritual sloth.

Our Lord warned us that in our prayer we should "use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they

think they shall be heard for their much speaking" <sup>1</sup> The point of this injunction lies in the word *vain* To call again and again upon God as did our Lord Himself in Gethsemane, "saying the same words," is not a vain but a most efficacious repetition There are expressions from the Psalter, from the Gospels and Epistles, and from the devotions of the saints, which can be repeated a thousand times, and if this be done with a strong, loving will and intention, the meaning and force of the words will not be exhausted Indeed, every repetition will be a deeper and more effectual cry of the heart to God, bringing a profounder realization of His presence and of His love

But note well that this is not a truth which one can realize by merely being told of it, or by reading about it in books We must experience it Go into some quiet place, some place where perhaps you can speak aloud without disturbing others or being interrupted, and with heart, will and entire attention and intention, set powerfully upon God, cry, "Father, Father, Father," not thinking anything about Him, but calling Him again and again as a trusting child might call in the dark to a loving father After the first cry, pause, keep an intense silence within, and hearken Then cry again, "Father, Father" Your experience will be unique if you do not find in some such simple devotion a very close drawing to the Father's heart Other expressions, the repeating of the Sacred Name of Jesus, or a loving address to the Holy Ghost, may be found of equal help, and as our experience deepens we shall find profit in many expressions which will be readily suggested to us

The flesh may grow weary after a time, but do not

<sup>1</sup> St Matt vi 7

be discouraged. Distraction and blankness of mind and spirit will intervene, but renew the attention resolutely, and the blessing will come, though it may seem to tarry long.

The Appendix to this book contains many devotions, taken from Holy Scripture, or from the contemplations of the saints, or arranged after the manner of the prayers of the saints, from which selection may be made. A word of warning is needed regarding these devotions. Certain types of mind are apt to say, on first examining unaccustomed devotions, "I do not like this kind of prayer; it is not real to me, it does not appeal to me." To put it on the lowest level, this is bad psychology. It raises inhibitions. It is like the child who says the moment a lesson is presented to it, "I can't do it." Every teacher knows the devastating effect of this on the mind and morale of the child. So long as we think we cannot do a certain thing, the chances are that we really cannot. But we have no moral or intellectual right to say we cannot do what we have never tried. Short shrift would be given to a young man starting out on a business career who, on being confronted with an untried task, would say, "I cannot do it." Why then should such pusillanimity be tolerated in spiritual affairs?

We may think that the devotions in question fail to express what is within us, and that it is therefore unreal; but as reasonably might a little child, learning to talk, say of some new word or phrase, "I cannot use it; it has no reality for me." We have not yet learned this language of heaven, and we can only learn it by using it. And to reject a form of prayer because it does not "appeal" to me is to go on the assumption that my present sense of, and capacity for, devotion

is exactly right, full and complete, and needs no further development, and that the test of the value of a prayer is whether it happens to fit into my present psychological frame. If it does not, it must not be suggested that anything is wrong with me, but that the prayer is unsuitable. We have only to state this attitude to realize the absurdity of it. Remember that prayers to which we are unaccustomed almost always seem to us unreal. The case is like that of one who for the first time in his life takes part in liturgical worship. It seems distressing and impossible, but persevered in it becomes a strength and a joy. In like manner, these prayers after a time call up from the heart dormant and undeveloped aspirations after God which will prove to be powerful leadings to bring you to His feet.

No universal rule can be made for the use of these prayers. Sometimes it is profitable, especially when a spontaneous spirit of devotion seems lacking, to kneel and read with close, enforced attention several pages of such exercises. This often lifts one up into an atmosphere of prayer. But generally one should choose some act or ejaculation, and, as we have been instructed, repeat it again and again, holding oneself in the presence of God, and continuing it as long as we are able to extract strength and sweetness from it.

This repetition, however, is not of necessity an external act, involving the use of the voice. It might well be an interior, mental repetition, made again and again in silence. Some find this method less distracting. Some use no other method. There has, however, as we have seen, been a close connection between such prayer and some of the higher forms of active contemplation. The early Franciscans accompanied their

contemplations with much vocal and other external expression, and of St Dominic, a great contemplative, it was said that his loud cries and groanings used to awaken his brethren as he made his all-night contemplation in the adjoining church. Father Baker, in his *Confessions*, tells us of his own experience of "uttering and venting forth his aspirations," so as to be in peril of disturbing others <sup>1</sup>

While the ideal contemplative prayer is that in which there is neither voice nor any mental operation save that of the will, yet forms of prayer, provided they be of the right kind, are to be regarded not only as preparatory to contemplation, but as an expression of the interior activity, and, therefore, in a real sense, a part of the contemplative work itself which is offered to God—"with full accord of mouth and of heart," as Hilton expresses it <sup>2</sup> This is one of the ways in which we glorify God in our bodies, as the apostle enjoins. Father Augustine Baker, in the work we have just been citing, speaks of his own aspirations, which he holds to be the highest form of active contemplation, and says, "sometimes they were only mental, sometimes also vocal, and sometimes joined with bodily motions" <sup>3</sup> The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, dealing with the higher forms of contemplation only, includes formal prayer of certain kinds as proper to this exercise, and places it in the same non-discursive category as is contemplation itself. The same author devotes four of his terse chapters to the discussion of his counsel that such prayers be not only short, but in words of one syllable, such as "sin" and "God"

<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Confessions*, p. 102

<sup>2</sup> *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. III. ch. xii

<sup>3</sup> Baker, *Confessions*, p. 105

He says, "It is best when it is in pure spirit, without special thought or any pronouncing of words, unless it be any seldom time, when for abundance of spirit it bursteth up into word"<sup>1</sup> He advises much repetition of these words "Although the shortness of prayer be greatly commended here, nevertheless the oftness of prayer is never the rather refrained For it should never cease till the time were that it had fully gotten that that it longed after"<sup>2</sup>

Whether or not one follows the suggestion as outlined above, the prayers, in every case, should be brief Long or involved expressions almost always produce distraction Single words, short acts of endearment, are best. But in employing variety one must have in mind the ideal contemplative prayer, and seek to reduce it to the lowest terms Variety should never mean mere novelty One test of advance in this prayer is to be found in the length of time the soul can hold itself in the presence of God with the fewest possible changes in the expression of its love But it is not everyone who, like the Poverello of Assisi, can lie all night prostrate in unbroken contemplation, upheld in his lofty devotion by the single, constant cry, "*Deus meus et omnia*, My God and my All" There are few who, with St' Bruno, can find material for hours of contemplation in the one heart-cry, "O Divine Goodness", or, with St Francis Xavier, can find sweet union with God in the oft-repeated ejaculation, "O Most Holy Trinity", or, perhaps best of all, with St Paul of the Cross, can repeat over and over, with ever-deepening fervour, the exclamation, "O Love of God, O Love of God"

<sup>1</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch xl

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, ch xxxix

But as one grows more experienced in this mode of prayer, he will find that the desire for change will be less and less, until, if it be God's will, he will enjoy the privilege of gazing upon Him for long periods of time without needing to be sustained by any such external, or even silent, helps. But if we are slow in reaching this happy and rare stage, let us not be distressed as though we were failing in our endeavour. There have been many great contemplatives who were unable to pray without such aids, and many of them have found such exercises always necessary at the beginning of every period of prayer.

It is also a question whether the nature of any creature is such that it can maintain itself long in the attitude of pure contemplation, without some expression of what is being experienced within. Even the seraphim before the throne of God, though they rest not day nor night from their unbroken contemplation, yet continually cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy." The heavenly contemplation, as described in the Scriptures, is not wordless worship.

We are not to think that long continuance in the use of the same cry to God means no change. Life in the creature is growth, and growth in the human soul means change, continual change. But such change is not a matter of accident. It follows an ordered plan prepared by the Holy Spirit. And there is a different plan for every soul, for God never deals with any two souls alike. The outward expression may be the same, but the force of no two acts can ever be the same. The fact that five seconds ago I said, "Jesus, I love Thee," wrought a change in me, so that when I say the same words again, I bring to them a stronger spirit of love and devotion to our Lord than would

have been possible in the first instance. The first act brought me into closer and fuller union with Him; and although I may not perceive it, so profound a change was wrought in me that each succeeding act makes upon my character an increasingly powerful impress, the force and effect of which is ever mounting. So, strictly speaking, there is no repetition. It is not the same, but a different thing that is done. Thus, as we go on in the work of prayer, the soul does not, cannot, abide in any one stay. There is a continual deepening of spiritual quality, an intensification of love, and with love all the other virtues flowering every moment into new and richer things.

While the definite forms of which we have been speaking have been commended by many saints, we are also taught that we are not to allow these prayers to become rigid. They must be free and flexible. We must govern them and use them, and not let them use and govern us. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the soul must maintain control of its materials and of the instruments of this divine craft. One of the surest ways that leads to contemplation is to place oneself in the presence of the divine Master, to converse with Him easily and freely, not seeking to measure our speech any more than we would measure the love of which it is the expression, but talking to Him, in a simple, loving manner, as a little child out of the love of a pure heart prattles to a dear father.

Let us remember as a final thought in the consideration of this great subject that the things we have been dealing with in this book are not theories. Philosophizing on sacred things has its necessary place, but no soul ever soared aloft on the wings of mere philosophy. These things must be put into actual



practice. He who does not really advance in his life of prayer is drifting backward towards the loss of God. Advance means labour. To row upstream one must bend to the oars. No lesson is more needed in our day than that which teaches that prayer is hard work. Advance also means that one dares not be content with any achievement, however high it may be. *Plus ultra* must be our motto. There is always more beyond, something richer and fuller which God has prepared for us. We shall not secure it in its fullness in this life, but we shall not be without fault before God if we do not strive, as far as in us lies, to use the means of which we have knowledge, and which will make for the attaining of these higher things. One thing is quite certain—if we do not begin it in this life, there is no possibility of our having it in the life to come.

A few quiet minutes devoted to-day to the exercise of holding oneself calmly, lovingly, resolutely in the presence of God, will open the gates of the soul, that God, entering in, may fill it with the infinite strength and sweetness of His love which is His essential Self; and this will mark for us the beginning of a new and nobler way of life. It is a rich opportunity. Let us give ourselves to it generously, and see if God will not show us a fullness of joy, an access of spiritual power, beyond all that the past has wrought.

## EXERCISES OF AFFECTIVE AND CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

### ASPIRATIONS TO THE MOST HOLY TRINITY<sup>1</sup>

I My Father, my Saviour, my Sanctifier  
Strengthen me with Thy strength,  
Console me with Thine ever-  
lasting peace,  
Enlighten me with Thy uncre-  
ated brightness

II O my compassionate God  
Give me to drink  
of the rivers  
of grace which flow from Thee,  
Father, Son, Spirit,  
The grace of Thy consubstantial  
love,  
The grace of Thy co-eternal love

✓ III O dear Lord, the Triune God,  
Lead me from strength to strength,  
Lead me gently, sweetly,  
Lead me tenderly, lovingly,  
Till Thou bring me  
into Thy heaven

IV O my all-sufficient Lord  
Keep my whole being fixed  
on Thee,  
And while I gaze on Thee  
grant that my love  
for Thee may ever grow  
till I am wholly one with  
Thee, O loving Lord

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Cardinal Newman

- V O Trine God  
I adore Thee, the true and  
only Light,  
From eternity to eternity, before  
any creature was,  
Thou wast alone, alone and yet  
not solitary,  
For Thou hast ever been the  
Blessed Three-in-One
- VI O Most dear Lord:  
Thou alone art the Food  
for eternity,  
And Thou alone;  
Thou alone canst satisfy  
the soul of man,  
And Thou alone
- VII O Holy, Blessed and Glorious Trinity.  
Eternity would be misery  
without Thee,  
To see Thee, to gaze on Thee,  
To contemplate Thee,  
this alone is joy inexhaustible

### THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS <sup>1</sup>

- I O good Jesus,  
O sweet Jesus,  
O Jesus, Son of the  
Virgin Mary,  
Be merciful to me
- II O Gracious Jesus,  
By Thy Precious Blood,  
Despise not those who call  
upon Thy most sweet Name  
of Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from St Bernardine of Siena

- III Thy Name of Jesus  
       is a sweet Name,  
 Thy Name of Jesus is  
       a saving Name,  
 O Jesus, be unto me a Jesus,  
       for what does Jesus mean  
       but Saviour?
- IV. O Good Jesus,  
       Let not my sins destroy me,  
       whom Thine almighty goodness  
       hath created and redeemed
- V. O Good Jesus,  
       Acknowledge what is  
       Thine in me,  
       Take from me all that  
       is not Thine
- VI O Most Merciful Jesus,  
       Thy Name is a Name of power,  
       Thy Name is a Name of healing,  
       Thy Name is a Name of sweetness,  
       Thy Name is above every Name

## A ROSARY OF THE HOLY NAME

*(Call upon the Name of the Lord, His Name of Power, His Name of Sweetness, His Name of Healing, His Name of Joy Let each utterance of His Name be an ever intenser cry of the lover for the Beloved Set heart and mind and will upon Him with concentration, strong and deep, and cry, JESUS, JESUS ')*

### I

*To the Glory of God, the Father.*

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 I love Thee!  
 Have mercy on me!

## II

*To the Glory of God, the Eternal Son*

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 I love Thee!  
 Have mercy on me!

## III

*To the Glory of God, the Blessed Spirit*

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 I love Thee!  
 Have mercy on me!

## IV

*To the Praise of the Divine Unity*

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 I love Thee!  
 Have mercy on me!

## V

*To the Praise of the Loving Trinity*

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
 I love Thee!  
 Have mercy on me!

THE SACRED PASSION<sup>1</sup>

- I O Jesus Christ,  
 Eternal sweetness of the souls that  
 love Thee,

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from St Bridgit of Sweden

Call to mind Thine exceeding sorrow  
even unto death,  
And by Thy Cross and Passion,  
Save us and deliver us

II. O Jesus Christ,  
Thrilling joy of the hearts that  
love Thee,  
Recall Thine Agony and Bloody  
Sweat,  
And by Thy Cross and Passion,  
Save us and deliver us

III O Jesus Christ,  
King most lovely, and loving One  
most dear,  
Recall the bitter anguish of Thy  
fainting soul,  
And by Thy Cross and Passion,  
Save us and deliver us

IV O Jesus Christ,  
Saviour and Lover of the world,  
Recall the fivefold Agony of  
Thy wounds,  
And by Thy Cross and Passion,  
Save us and deliver us

V. O Jesus Christ,  
Glory of the angels and paradise  
of delights,  
Recall the bitter scorn with which  
Thine enemies blasphemed Thee,  
And by Thy Cross and Passion,  
Save us and deliver us

VI O Jesus Christ,  
Unfailing Fountain of eternal love,  
Recall the parching thirst Thou  
didst endure  
And by Thy Cross and Passion,  
Save us and deliver us

VII. O Jesus Christ,  
Sweetness beyond all sweetness  
of the heart,  
Recall the bitterness of the  
vinegar and gall,  
And by Thy Cross and Passion,  
Save us and deliver us.

VIII. O Jesus Christ,  
Thrilling in Thy presence in the heart;  
Recall the shuddering horror  
of Thy soul  
When Thou didst seem forsaken  
of Thy Father,  
And by Thy Cross and Passion,  
Save us and deliver us

IX. O Jesus Christ,  
Strength unfailing to the  
heart that loves,  
By Thy wounds and by Thy  
gaping Side,  
Save us and deliver us

X. O Jesus Christ,  
Unfathomed depth of love compassionate,  
Recall the all-engulfing darkness  
of Thy soul,  
And by Thy Cross and Precious Blood,  
Save us and deliver us

XI. O Jesus Christ,  
Bond of charity, binding all  
goodness into one,  
Recall the awful loneliness of  
Thy Passion,  
And by Thy Cross and Precious Blood,  
Save us and deliver us.

XII. O Jesus Christ,  
Love unconquered, Love unconquerable,  
By Thy last exceeding great  
and bitter cry,  
Save us and deliver us

- XIII. O Jesus Christ,  
Only-begotten of the Father,  
Recall Thy triumph over death,  
And by Thy Cross and Passion,  
Save us and deliver us
- XIV. O Jesus Christ,  
Dead upon the woeful Cross,  
Lover of those who do Thee  
such despite,  
By the power of Thy Precious Death,  
Save us and deliver us
- XV. O Jesus Christ,  
True and living Vine,  
Fruitful unto endless life  
to all who love Thee,  
Recall the fountain of Thy  
Sacred Side, and  
Give me the refreshing banquet of  
Thy love

THE JOY OF THE CROSS<sup>1</sup>

- I O Jesus, Lord of my soul,  
What a cross hast Thou prepared for  
those who live in Thee!  
A cross at once light and  
most heavy—  
Light because it is so sweet,  
Heavy because my patience is  
so small  
Let me not, O Lord, know deliverance  
from my cross unless that  
deliverance come from Thee

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from St. Teresa's *Autobiography*



- II. O Jesus, Lord of my soul,  
Let my will be lent for ever  
to Thy holy will  
Take from me all selfish longing for  
sweetness of spirit,  
And teach me to walk in the way of  
Thy cross
- III. O Jesus, Lord of my soul,  
Cost what it may, let me not come  
to Thee with empty hands.  
Behold my life,  
Behold my will.  
Behold my good name,  
I am Thine—dispose of me according to  
Thy will
- IV. O Jesus, Lord of my soul,  
Do Thou, O Lord, perform Thy  
will in me.  
Let me never offend Thee,  
Nor ever let Thy grace depart from me.  
I will to suffer, Lord, because  
Thou hast suffered
- V. O Jesus, Lord of my soul—  
Thou showest Thy loving power when  
Thou willest;  
And Thou willest it always if only  
I can will it too  
All things fail, but Thou, Lord of all,  
Thou failest not.
- VI. O Jesus, Lord of my soul.  
Those who love Thee, how little have  
they to suffer!  
How gently, how sweetly, how tenderly  
dost Thou deal with them!  
Thou layest indeed a heavy cross on  
those who love Thee,  
But only that they may learn in the  
depth of that trial to know  
the depth of Thy love

- VII. O Jesus, Lord of my soul  
Thou hast said unto me,  
"Thou art Mine, and I am thine,  
Merit lies only in doing, in  
suffering, in loving"  
O Lord, either to suffer or to  
die, I ask of Thee no other  
boon than this

## FOR THE LOVERS OF JESUS

- I O Good Jesu  
Give me Thy love that I may love  
Thee only,  
For I have no power to love save through  
the grace of that dear love that comes  
from Thee
- II. O Good Jesu  
I trust Thee with my all,  
with my present and my future,  
with my time and my eternity  
Deal with me as Thou wilt and knowest  
best  
Only bind me fast with the bonds of  
Thine everlasting love
- III. O Good Jesu  
Strength of the weary,  
Rest of the restless,  
By the weariness and unrest of  
Thy bitter Cross,  
Come to me who am weary that I  
may rest in Thee
- IV. O Good Jesu  
If only I might love Thee!  
If only I might glorify Thee!  
For Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord,  
Thou God of truth

V. O Good Jesu

By Thy loneliness in the garden,  
By Thy desolation on the Cross,  
By the darkness and silence of  
Thy tomb,  
Give me Thy sweet companionship

VI O Good Jesu :

Knit my heart to Thy Heart,  
Hold me fast till I am lost  
in Thee,  
Hold me fast till I am found  
in Thee

VII. O Good Jesu :

Thou knowest the longing of  
my heart,  
Make me to love Thee who hast  
so loved me.  
Thine I would be for Thou hast  
bought me for Thine own,  
Thou who didst give Thyself for me,  
give Thyself to me

VIII. O Good Jesu .

I hate what Thou hatest,  
I love what Thou lovest;  
For Thou, my heart's truest and  
dearest Love,  
Hast made me one with Thyself

IX O Good Jesu -

Open my eyes that I may see all  
that displeaseth Thee ,  
Open mine eyes that I may see all  
that delighteth Thee  
Make me strong with Thine own Heart's  
strength  
To choose Thee more lovingly,  
To seek Thee more diligently,  
To find Thee each day, each hour ,  
And above all else  
To love Thee,

- X O Good Jesu  
Who hast borne Thy Cross for me,  
Teach me to bear my cross  
for Thee  
Thou knowest my weakness,  
Help me, help me, help me!  
Bear my cross for me,  
Bear my cross in me
- XI O Good Jesu.  
Let Thy Cross be my cross,  
That Thy love may be my love.  
Break, break this heart of mine  
That my heart may be one with  
Thy broken Heart
- XII O Good Jesu  
Write Thy wounds upon my heart  
That in them I may read sorrow  
and love,  
Sorrow, that I may bear all suffering  
for Thee,  
Love, that I may despise all love  
save Thine

## ASPIRATIONS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

- I O sweet Spirit of the Living God!
- II O Spirit of the Living God,  
loving and tender
- III O Spirit of the Living God,  
tender and of great mercy.
- IV O Spirit of God,  
merciful and gracious.
- V O Spirit of God,  
gracious and full of compassion
- o

- VI O Spirit of God,  
crowning me with loving kindness
- VII O Spirit of the Living God,  
full of gentleness and peace
- VIII O Spirit of God,  
strong and patient,  
yet provoked every day.
- IX O Sweet and Blessed Spirit,  
patient and ever-loving  
teacher
- X. O Spirit of the Loving God,  
Strength of my life,  
Joy of my soul
- XI O Holy Spirit,  
Very God of Very God,  
The eternal Love of the Father,  
The eternal Love of the Son,  
binding the Godhead into one
- XII. O Holy Spirit,  
the Light of every soul,  
the Strength of every heart,  
the Source of every virtue
- XIII. O All-Holy and Adorable Spirit,  
our comfort and our hope,  
our joy and our consolation,  
our strength and our wisdom.
- XIV O Spirit of God,  
Thou who art the ineffable Gift,  
and the Giver of all gifts,  
I love Thee
- XV O Thou divine Fire,  
Make my heart a fiery furnace  
of love for Thee  
I long for Thee alone,  
I desire Thee alone

## THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

## I

## AN EXERCISE OF FAITH

- ✓ I Lord, increase our faith
- ✓ II Lord, I believe, Help Thou  
mine unbelief
- ✓ III My Lord and my God !
- IV Dear Lord and God,  
Thou art all-wise, all-good, all-loving  
Can I do aught but trust Thee,  
and rest my whole confidence in Thee?
- ✓ V O God, in Thee have I trusted ,  
Let me never be put to  
confusion
- ✓ VI The Lord is my light and  
my salvation,  
Whom, then, shall I fear?  
The Lord is the strength  
of my life,  
Of whom, then, shall I be afraid?
- ✓ VII. I believe in Thee,  
• my gracious and merciful Father,  
my tender Redeemer,  
my all-loving Sanctifier.

## II

## AN EXERCISE OF HOPE

- ✓ I Lord,  
I have a good hope because  
of Thy word  
Let me not be disappointed  
of my hope

- II O dear Lord Christ,  
 Increase in me the virtue of  
 hope, that steadfast ex-  
 pectation of those things  
 which are sure to come to  
 pass because Thou hast  
 promised them
- III O Lord, patient and ever-loving,  
 I hope for the pardon of my sins,  
 because the power of Thy love  
 within me is stronger than the  
 power of my sin
- IV Lord, compassionate and tender,  
 I hope for the help of Thy grace,  
 Thou hast purchased it for me with  
 Thy Precious Blood,  
 Whence, then, shouldst Thou withhold  
 it from Thy trusting child?
- V. O Lord Christ,  
 I rest my hope in Thee because Thou  
 hast given me great and precious  
 promises, and Thou art faithful  
 who hast promised

## III

## AN EXERCISE OF LOVE

- I O love of God, O love of God, O love of God!
- II My God and my All, my God and my All!
- III O Divine Goodness, O Divine Goodness!
- IV O Lord,  
 Too late have I known Thee,  
 Too late have I loved Thee,  
 O Beauty, ever ancient and  
 ever new!

V O my soul,  
Where is thy love?  
Where is thy desire?  
Where is thy beauty?  
Is it not in Him, thy God  
and thy All?

VI O my Lord,  
Very God of mine:  
He who loves Thee not  
Knows Thee not  
O boundless mercy of my God,  
That Thou shouldst love me who  
have so wounded Thee!

VII O dear Lord Jesus,  
I have so often wounded Thy  
Heart by my sins,  
But, Lord, Thou knowest all things,  
Thou knowest that I love Thee!

## ASPIRATIONS AFTER THE BEATIFIC LIFE

I. O God, the Living God!  
Thou Spring of living waters,  
When shall I see Thy beauty?  
When shall I slake my thirst at the  
abounding streams of Thy love?

II O strong and living God!  
Thou Spring of living waters,  
When shall I pass from this  
barren land to the waters  
of Thy sweetness?  
I thirst, O Lord, I thirst;  
Give me of Thyself to drink,  
For Thou art the Fountain of life



- III Come, Lord Jesus, and tarry not,  
Come, Lord Jesus, and visit us  
in peace;  
Come, and release the captives  
from their chains,  
Come, that we may praise Thee with  
a perfect heart
- IV My Light and My Redeemer,  
Come, bring my soul out of prison,  
Come, that I may give thanks unto  
Thy Holy Name  
Come, and bring to us the longed  
for rest.
- V. O God, our Saviour,  
Thou Hope of the ends of the  
earth,  
And of those afar off on the  
wide sea,  
We are tossed upon the waves  
of this world,  
But Thou standest on the shore  
beholding our sore peril,  
Save us and help us!
- VI. O gracious Lord,  
When shall I see Thy day,  
Thy day of joy and gladness,  
That I may rejoice in it,  
That I may be glad in it?
- VII O bright and glorious day  
That knows no night,  
Whose sun shall nevermore go down,  
That day of days when I shall hear  
the voice of praise,  
the voice of loving adoration.
- VIII O bright and glorious day  
That knows no night,  
Whose sun shall nevermore go down,

That day of days when I shall  
Enter into the house of the  
Lord, My God,  
Wherein are things great and un-  
searchable,  
Wherein are marvellous things,  
Things sweet and without number

IX O bright and glorious day,  
Where is sweet, supreme security,  
Where is the Blessed Trinity, the  
blissful vision of the Godhead,  
and the joy unending of my Lord

X O joy upon joy,  
Joy transcending all joys!  
When shall I come to Thee and  
behold my Lord?  
How long, O Lord, shall it be  
said to me,  
Tarry yet a little while?

XI O Kingdom of endless ages,  
Where sorrow and sighing have  
fled away,  
Where everlasting joy is upon the  
heads of Thy blessed ones!

XII. O how glorious is the Kingdom  
Wherein all Thy saints reign with  
Thee, O Lord,  
• Clothed with light as with a  
garment,  
And have upon their heads bright  
crowns of gold

XIII O everlasting Kingdom,  
Kingdom of peace and love,  
in whose courts dwell  
gladness without sorrow,  
joy infinite and unfading,  
service sweet and unwearied,  
light without darkness,  
life without death.

XIV. O everlasting Kingdom,  
Kingdom of peace and love,  
where the vigour of age knows  
no decay,  
where beauty withers not,  
and love doth not grow cold,  
for there we look forevermore  
upon the Face of God

XV O everlasting Kingdom,  
Whereon rests the untroubled light,  
Where broods the blessed calm  
of God,  
Where saints are at peace.

